



ASTROLOGER OF CHALDEA,

OR THE

LIFE OF FAITH.

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INTRODUCTION.

THE following sketches are drawn from veritable outlines of history. The incidents connected with the life of the venerable patriarch Abraham and his family, with the collateral events occurring during his eventful history, are full of romantic interest to every lover of sacred scenes, and though the author has drawn somewhat on the imagination, yet truth has not been subjected to fiction. Imagination may be legitimately allowed to exercise its strongest powers when bounded by the great outlines of truth, and the sacred writers themselves indulged in such a license, and so long as the imagination does not transcend the bounds of probability no valid objection can be urged against its exercise.

Talfourd says of the effects of an imaginative literature, "The world is not in danger of becoming too romantic. The golden threads of poesy are not too thickly or too closely interwoven with the web of existence. Sympathy is the first great lesson which man should learn. It will be ill for him, if he proceed no further, if his emotions are but excited to roll back on his heart and to be fostered in luxurious quiet. But unless he learns to feel for things in which he has no personal interest, he can achieve nothing generous or noble. The soul will not be the worse for thinking too well of its

kind, or believing that the highest excellence is within the reach of its exertions."

If the remarks of that distinguished man be true, and that they are, every genial nature will respond in the affirmative, it would be well instead of making fiction appear like truth for the purpose of securing credence, to present truth in the most attractive garb, and thus obviate the necessity of fiction. If in regard to mere works of fiction where the real is left and types of excellence are created for the purpose of exciting mankind to loftier standards in the attainment of higher excellencies, why should imagination be shut out of the realm of fact itself? If truths are important and salutary, the more interest they can be invested with the better, as in that case they will be more attractive and powerful in holding and guiding the mind along the sacred path.

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THE ASTROLOGER OF CHALDEA.

CHAPTER I.

THE FESTIVAL AT EDEN.

UR, or URIC, "the city of light or fire," for such was the meaning thereof in the Chaldean tongue, was situated in a valley on the bank of the river Tigris. The valley extended from the river to what is now denominated the Tiyari mountains, a chain of which extending north and south formed the ancient boundary between Persia on the north and east and Chaldea on the west.

The country around Ur, extending from its northern limits down to the city of Nineveh, a distance of many miles, was magnificent beyond description. The vale of Ispahan in Persia, with its varied and beautiful scenery of forest and plain and river, its trees and flowers and surrounding mountains, its days of cloudless skies and nights of starry beauty, could not vie with the valley of the Tigris. One spot particularly, which had been designated as the site of ancient Eden, was surpassingly beautiful.

In the center of this Eden was spread out a lake whose mirror-like surface reflected the graceful oriental trees which grew upon its banks, and the gorgeous flowers which lined its margin. Here nature had scattered with profusion her choicest gifts. Here were birds of brightest plumage and sweetest song. Art could add nothing to its beauty. Indeed, the clumsy hand of man would have destroyed its loveliness and blighted its flowers. It stood near the base of the mountain, about equidistant from Nineveh and Ur, the former of which was the residence of the great king of Assyria, whose palace was as rich and magnificent as the country of which the city of Nineveh was the metropolis. This palace was situated in an open plaza in the center of the city, which was built on an area sixty miles in circumference, and surrounded by a wall one hundred feet high, and so thick that three chariots could be driven abreast on its summit. On this wall were stationed, at proper distances, fifteen hundred towers, each of which was two hundred feet high. The city was an *oblong*, extending along the banks of the Tigris and back to the mountains. In the days of its greatest prosperity it contained about two hundred thousand souls. Besides the palace of the king, there were others of great extent and magnificence, surrounded by parks and pleasure gardens.

The city of Ur was located in a rural district, and

though not on a scale of equal magnificence with Nineveh, yet possessed some palaces and monuments of art which rendered it attractive. It contained a magnificent temple, the ruins of which have now, after the lapse of nearly four thousand years, been discovered by an oriental traveler. This temple was erected to the Sun, and here the priests of Chaldea assembled to worship the emblem of the Great Spirit. On its lofty summit the holy fire was kept perpetually burning, streaming afar over the valley and the plains of Mesopotamia ; and the traveler at night on the mountains of the east, or the far reaching plains on the west, could discern the representation or emblem of the object of their worship. Near its base, in the garden, surrounded by an enclosure, was the mystic tree and the holy fountain, with its sacred cup, from which the king and priests drank in honor to the Sun. This fountain was said to confer immortality, and all who were permitted to enter the enclosure and partake of its waters, were considered as consecrated to the Sun.

The inhabitants were mostly engaged in tilling the soil or occupied in the peaceful pursuits of a pastoral life, with the exception of the priests and those who were devoted to the study of Astrology. It was here that attention was first paid to the study of the stars, and from this point what knowledge the ancients had of Astronomy was spread throughout Babylonia and Persia, and the countries of the east.

To the beautiful retreat in the valley, of which we have already spoken, the citizens of Nineveh and Ur would frequently resort on festive occasions. The pride and beauty of Nineveh would often gather there, and there youth and pleasure would meet to join in the sacred dance, and Eden on such occasions, would resound with the wild tumultuous joy of the gathered throng. On the road winding down from the summits of the Tiari, or along the path across the plain, might be seen the young men and maidens with joyous hearts and bright anticipations, urging their way to the pleasure bowers.

On one of these occasions a youth from Ur, tall and graceful, with majestic mien and thoughtful countenance, entered the gay throng. He resided with his father, a renowned priest of the Sun, and devoted his time to the service of the temple and the study of the stars. Often, while standing out upon the observatory by night, has he gazed up into the clear deep vault above him, and, as his large black piercing eye would take in its field of vision the orbs of light that glittered in the outspread canopy, his spirit would whisper to him "and are these thy gods?"

Once, while lost in thoughtful reveries in regard to the Sabien worship and its gods, he was more than usually sad at the dreadful uncertainty which rested upon his mind in regard to his nature and destiny. Whence came he! — what was he! —

whither was he going? What would become of him? were thoughts which came with overwhelming weight upon his mind.

He had been among the favored few who had sat beneath the mystic tree; he had partaken of the holy cup, and was ranked among immortals; but alas! the draught satisfied not the longings of his spirit. There was within an aching void which sun nor moon nor stars nor holy flame nor sacred fount could fill. It was the yearning of the soul after an immortality which the worship of fire and light could never impart. These were fit and appropriate emblems of the Great Spirit who fills all space, and pervades immensity with his presence, but they were only emblems, inanimate emblems of Him, —

Whose spirit wraps the dusky mountain;—
Whose spirit hovers o'er the fountain:
While every rill and mighty river
Flows mingling with his praise forever."

As such, they were inadequate to pour light and comfort into his soul.

In this state of mind he had resolved that he would attend the approaching festival at Eden.

How often does the unrest and disquiet of the soul prompt its possessor to go in quest, alas often too vainly, of that which it cannot find at home. There is a desolateness which attends the weary spirit in its wanderings over the trackless waste, like the dove of Noah in quest of a kindred bower

in which to nestle, that only those realize who have been conscious of the wilderness around them, though in the midst of crowding, pressing, gain, and pleasure-seeking thousands.

On the evening previous to his departure, he had been out to his grotto for the purpose of engaging in his evening meditations and worship. It was a night of vernal beauty. The full-orbed moon rose bright over the Tiyari mountains, and shed her soft and silvery light on the temple of black granite, and seemed even to mellow the glare of the holy fire on its summit. The noise and bustle of Ur was left behind, as Abram "the elevated," for such was the meaning of his name in the Aramean tongue, entered his grotto. Taking his seat, he turned to the east, and fixing his eyes upon the god of light, he exclaimed, "Divine Creator, the manifest Deity and Savior, let thy beams illumine my soul and guide thou me by thy sacred influences."

Then turning to the west, he beheld the evening star hanging just over the horizon. "Behold," said he to himself, "the God and Lord of my destiny. Brightest and best of all the stars of night, guide thou my steps, nor let my feet wander in darkness."

As he gazed and adored the God of his destiny, and was wrapt in intense thought, behold ! alas ! the star of his worship and fate sank below the line separating earth and sky, and was lost to his vision.

“ Ah,” said he, “ it is ever thus with my brightest visions and fondest hopes. Just when I seem to grasp and feel their power to bless and save, like the mirage in the desert, they are gone ; like the meteor’s flash they disappear, and leave my soul in darkness.”

Turning in the direction of the temple he said : “ Yonder burns the only light that does not expire. The moon and stars all have their time of departure, and leave the world to darkness and myself ; but thou dost burn on, holy light. O, that thou wast not of man’s kindling. Even the sun, the great god of fire, only has its day, as moon and stars have their night, but day and night thy vestal fires ascend, and burn on forever. Can it be,” said the youthful devotee, “ that these are my creator ; that the mountain and river and valley, and trees and beasts and birds and reptiles are the work of their hands ? If so, why do they not impart happiness to their worshippers, and why does death come to man ? King and priest and worshipper alike have gone down to the chambers of the dead. They return no more to greet us with their smiles, and cheer us with their presence. O, my friends ! where are they ? ” he exclaimed with the deepest emotion.

In an agony of grief he sank to the earth, and his sad and desolate heart poured forth its sorrows. He thought of his former companions and the one most

dear to his heart, whose presence always cheered him — the light of whose calm blue eye filled him with such wild delight, as she would gaze upon him when they met ; and whose mysterious disappearance from her native bower, was more like a terrible dream than a dread reality. Ah, where was she ? the idol of his heart. “ Alas, that neither beauty nor goodness, nor intense devotion to the gods, could save from the relentless power of death.”

While his mind was thus tossed as upon a sea of tumultuous passions, the night passed away. The god of light had hid himself behind the western mountains, and the god of fire was rising over the Tiyari as he entered the gate of Ur to make preparations for his departure.

At an early hour the city was astir, and the aged and the young were busily engaged in getting ready for the journey to Eden. A deputation of priests was sent from the temple of Ur to conduct the sacred ceremonies, as the nobility of Nineveh with their horses and chariots, together with a large multitude, were expected to be present on the occasion.

Eden smiled in all its vernal bloom. The sacred bowers never looked lovelier, while the whole atmosphere was redolent with fragrance, as the pilgrims from Ur entered the spacious arbors and reclined in the refreshing shade. The embowered lake was calm and not a ripple was seen upon its surface, ex-

cept occasionally, as a swan of snowy whiteness would glide among the water lilies.

Presently the blast of a trumpet is heard echoing through the bowers, and the assembled group start to their feet, for they know it is the herald's signal of the royal approach to Eden. Guards are stationed at the entrance of the royal bowers, and as there was no need of strewing flowers, for nature had already scattered them in thick profusion along his path, the king and his royal escort were greeted by the "all hail," of the multitude.

The royal equipage exceeded any thing that had ever before been beheld. The king was dressed in the most gorgeous apperal. A purple robe, elaborately ornamented and richly embroidered with gold and precious stones, enveloped his person. A massy crown of gold, decorated with gems, encircled his brow, and in his hand he held the royal scepter. The chariot in which he rode, was made of the richest wood from the far off mountains of Lebanon, inlaid with ivory and gold. The horses were richly caparisoned and were led by eunuchs whose ebony color indicated the country of their nativity. Two of these were on either side of the royal person, holding sacred fans as sun-screens. Then followed in the procession the princes and nobility of Nineveh, all arrayed in a style suited to the occasion.

It was the annual grand festival of the Sun, and all having arrived, even the dwellers from Tiynari,

and the magi from the vale of Ispahan, the priests engaged in making preparations for the morning orison, by the erection of an altar, the consecration of the sacred tree, and the formation of the mystic circle.

The young astrologer had never been here before. He had frequently witnessed similar ceremonies in the temple at Ur, but not with the same attendant pompous circumstances ; and anxious as he was to find the true light, or something that would satisfy the longings of his soul, and solve the doubts which gathered in darkening folds around him in regard to his destiny, he took a lively and all-absorbing interest in the preparations that were going on. When night came, he returned to the edge of the bower, where, unobstructed by the trees, he could gaze upon the moon and stars, and sigh out his spirit in prayers to those emblems of the gods of his fathers.

The first gray streaks of morning were tinging the tops of the adjacent mountain, as he rose from his tent and sallied forth to look upon the scene around him. All was quiet. The large pavilion of Nineveh's proud king and princes occupied the center of the encampment ; while ranged around at regular intervals were the tents of the multitude. The tent of the priests was pitched within the mystic circle, which also enclosed the altar and the sacred tree.

While he wandered and gazed upon these scenes, morning advanced, and the watchers from the moun-

tain announced by the blast of their trumpet the rising of the god of fire in the distant east. The sleepers were awakened, and soon all was life and activity in the Encampment of Eden. The tents were struck, folded and borne away, and the song of the priests summoned all to the circle. A messenger dove was perched upon the sacred tree, that so soon as the beams of the sun should strike its top, it might fly to the altar, and thus give to the priests the signal of the approach of their god.

All eyes were fastened upon the dove, which could be seen from the outer edge of the circle, nestled on the topmost branch. Another blast from the trumpet, and all voices were hushed as if by the stillness of death. Soon the dove was seen to spread its wings for flight ; its eyes had caught the rays of the sun, and gently descending to the altar, the torch lighted at the holy fire on the temple of the Sun in Ur, was applied to the victim, and instantly the priests fell on their faces, and the multitude bowed in adoration, while all invoked the blessings of their god, as the smoke and flame of the sacrifice ascended upwards from the altar.

Again and again the priests prostrated themselves, exclaiming, " Great is the Sun, the source of light and life to all mankind," to which all the people responded " Selah."

Not all, for there was one who stood in that group transfixed. He did not speak. He did not bow his

knee. His eyes were fastened on some object only visible to him in the distant heavens. He was motionless as a statue, and had it not been for the kindling fire of his dark lustrous eye, and the smile of inimitable sweetness which overspread like a glory his countenance, all would have supposed him dead. The young astrologer, for he it was who was thus exciting the attention and wonder of the multitude, could not be diverted from his gaze. Some thought he was smitten by the Sun, and that the god of fire had marked him for his own. To all entreaties he was deaf. There he stood, fixed and motionless, gazing up into the clear deep blue of that Assyrian sky.

At this juncture a young princess from the court of Nineveh, of slender form, richly attired, holding in her hand an alabaster vase of the most costly perfume, glided softly up to the stranger as if fearful of awakening him, yet with that intent she gently touched him, and placing the vase to his nostrils, she hoped to awaken him to consciousness. Finding this would not do, she commenced singing—

“Wake, brother, wake, the day has come,
The god of fire has left his home;
Wake, for the morning sacrifice
Will glad thy heart and cheer thine eyes.”

The charm was broken, the spell was dissolved, and the averted head gradually and gently turned until the eyes of the astrologer met the gaze of the

young and beautiful princess who had taken so much interest in his fate. In that gaze there was a recognition, and then a long embrace : the loved and lost was found.

Sarai, the princess, for thus meaneth her name in the language of Chaldea, the betrothed of Abram, had mysteriously disappeared from Ur, and she had been mourned as dead. For her rare beauty she had been abducted, and taken to the palace of the king to be placed among the maids of honor in the court of Nineveh.

To her he had a right,—if you please, a pre-emption right, which no king or potentate could set aside. Next to her God who claimed her as her creator, he claimed her as having the earliest and choicest affections of her heart. Love had united them, and the Great Spirit had sealed the bond which made them one forever.

The stranger, or rather the young astrologer and the princess, soon separated, the latter returning to her company, and the former to his gaze, but not with that intense fixedness which had before characterized it. Enough had passed between them, however, in the short space in which they were together, to make all arrangements necessary for a re-union.

But what fixed the gaze of the young astrologer? What potent spell bound him to that spot so completely absorbing his spirit, and kindling such raptures in his heart? Had he found the object of his

anxious search—the satisfying portion of his soul ; and was it an apprehension that he should lose the long sought prize, that prompted him to turn again to his gaze in the heavens as quickly as the needle turns to its pole, when the disturbing influences of the magnet are withdrawn?

Yes, that object for which his spirit longed and which he had sought by night and by day, on mountain and in vale, in temple and grotto, had at last been found, and all the chambers of his soul were filled with unutterable joy and rapturous delight.

It was not the god of fire that had riveted his attention. Far up in that cloudless sky, there shone a light and glory above the brightness of the sun. So intense was the splendor, that to the young astrologer the sun himself grew dim. It was a revelation of the Great Spirit, the Divine Shekinah,—a manifestation of the God of Heaven, the Creator of sun, moon and stars, whose power dissolves the bands of Orion, gives to the influences of the Pleiades their charm, and guides Arcturus with his satellites. That glory was a divine afflatus to his soul, and as he gazed, deep upon the tablet of his heart was stamped indelibly the image of the Invisible One—

“Whose throne is darkness in the abyss
Of uncreated light.”

The Chaldeans, Babylonians, and Persians were

worshippers of the sun, moon, and stars. Their religion was a system of astrology, by which they claimed to know with the greatest exactness, by means of the aspect and combination of the stars and planets, what would be the genius, temper, manners, events of life, and destiny of all whose birth was noted. The expanse of the firmament, according to this system, was divided into twelve equal parts, denominated the signs of the zodiac. These twelve equal parts possessed attributes peculiar to themselves, such as wealth, honor, and distinction. The planets were divided into the propitious, the malignant, and the mixed, and those who were born under these stars were born to a destiny partaking of the nature of the stars which presided over their birth.

In the sacred writers we find allusions in reference to the influence of the stars, which would lead one to infer that the astrology of the Chaldeans was a prevailing sentiment among all the oriental nations, and to some extent at least, gave a tinge to the thoughts of the patriarchs and prophets of olden time. In the Old Testament, the patriarch and prime minister of the court of Egypt, Joseph, in pronouncing a blessing upon Jacob, pointed to the star of his destiny. The patriarch and prince of Uz referred to the influence of Orion and Pleiades, and urged upon his counsellors to worship the god of "the Seven Stars and Orion." The proud mon-

arch of Israel, though not a worshipper of the stars, yet paid a most profound attention to their study, and through the works of God, bowed in humble adoration before the throne of their Creator. In referring to the protection and defense of the servants of God, he declared that the "sun should not smite them by day nor the moon by night;" and one of Zion's sweetest minstrels sang of the sure protection of those who worshipped the God of heaven, in strains like the following :

"No damp shall blast thy couch by night, no star
Dart its malignant fires so far."

The descendants and successors of the magi thousands of years afterwards, while engaged in their astrological labors in predicting the fate of kings and nations by the position and motion of the stars, were startled in their nightly contemplations by the strange and sudden appearance of a new star which crossed the field of their vision. As they gazed upon its clear bright disc, and felt the soft mysterious influence of its rays, their minds were filled with wonder and delight. It was the re-appearance of a light which had come to the Jewish law-giver on Horeb and Sinai, and which subsequently filled the Tabernacle in the wilderness and the Temple at Jerusalem with a glory never seen by mortal eye since the cherub stood with flaming sword to guard the gates of ancient Eden. The magi looked upon the celestial visitant as a harbinger of good, for

there was nothing malignant in its aspect. In searching the ancient predictions they found it to answer to the Shiloh of prophecy, whose coming had long been looked for, and formed a part of the traditions of the East. Sacred history informs us that the magi followed this star, and it led them to the very spot where the king of the Jews was born. It was, in the language of Astrology, the star of his destiny.

The Persians adored the Sun, and through their priests and magi, kept up a perpetual worship by means of a perpetual fire which they kept burning on their altars in temples dedicated to that orb. When the god of day first gilded the east with his rising beams, as the eye caught them, the profoundest veneration was paid to him as the source of all their blessings. To him they dedicated a magnificent chariot, with horses of the greatest beauty and value. The same ceremony was performed by the Chaldeans and Babylonians, and we learn from the Sacred Record that some of the kings of Judah introduced the ceremony into the very precincts of the Temple of Jehovah; and the rites were kept up until Josiah ascended the throne. The Scriptures inform us that Josiah “took away the horses that the kings of Judah had given to the Sun, at the entering in of the house of the Lord by the chamber of Nathanmelech the chamberlain, which was in the suburbs, and burnt the chariots of the Sun with

fire. And the altars that were on the top of the upper chamber of Ahaz, which the kings of Judah had made, and the altars which Manasseh had made in the two courts of the house of the Lord, did the king beat down and break them down from thence, and cast them into the brook Kedron." Sometimes they sacrificed oxen to this god, who was very much known amongst them by the name of Mithra. They also paid a particular veneration to fire, the emblem of their god, invoking it first in their sacrifices, and carrying it before their kings in all their marches, intrusting the keeping of the sacred emblem which came down from heaven to their priests or magi, who would have regarded it as the greatest disaster which could befall them if they suffered it to expire. History informs us that the emperor Heraclius, when at war with the Persians, demolished several of their temples, and extinguished the sacred fire which had been preserved until that time, which caused great lamentation and mourning throughout the entire nation. The magi or priests were the guardians of all the ceremonies relating to the fire worship, and it was to them the people looked for instruction therein, and from them they derived a knowledge of the particular days for the worship of their gods, as well as the particular manner of sacrifice to be offered to them. As the magi were all of one tribe, and as none but the son of a priest could aspire to the honor of the priesthood, they kept all their mys-

tic learning, whether in religious or political matters, to themselves and their families.

The great festival now being celebrated, was, as we have already seen, the annual festival of the Sun. It had commenced, and the god of the east had risen and blessed with his beams the opening sacrifice. But a more important and imposing sacrifice remained yet to be performed. The sun was mounting up the sky and was gradually approaching the zenith in his fiery car. Preparations were made for the great sacrifice. In another part of the grove and joining the mountain ridge, was constructed of stone a huge altar, on the near side of which was an inclined plane sufficiently wide for three horses to pass abreast upon it. On either side of the way and around the summit, were placed a great quantity of dry wood, rendered highly inflammable by having been immersed in bitumen. The horses devoted to the sacrifice were those brought by the king of Nineveh. They were more richly attired than ever, and garlanded with flowers they were led forth by the magi and harnessed to a chariot of cedar the most elaborately carved, and inlaid with gold, silver, and precious stones. While these preparations were going on, interesting as was the scene, there was another subject which absorbed the thoughts of the assembled thousands, and that was the appearance of the chosen one of the Sun who should guide the horses and chariot of fire. In secret conclave the

magi had made the selection from among the young priests, and Abram was the chosen one.

The hour arrived. Every eye was turned in the direction of the mystic circle, and soon was seen issuing therefrom a solemn procession, headed by the priests, who heralded the way for the approach of the young astrologer. He was clad in scarlet, with a crown upon his head, on the golden bands of which were represented the transit of a star over the blazing disc of the sun. Calm and thoughtful, but with firm and steady step, he ascended the chariot and took the reins of the fiery steeds who were prancing to be gone. The faggots were kindled on the altar, and the smoke and flames rose up the side of the mountain. Hemmed in by the living ramparts on either side, the horses dashed furiously up the ascent of the burning altar, and soon were lost to sight amid the flames which fiercely flashed around. The horses passed through the fire, but ere they reached the summit of the mountain they fell blackened with death. Abram alone passed unscathed amid the flames, and when the multitude beheld him returning in triumph from the fiery ordeal, they looked upon him as the child of the Sun, and there went up the shout of thousands in honor of his name.

CHAPTER II.

ROYAL FESTIVAL AT NINEVEH.

THE sacred festival at Eden was ended, the king and his nobles with the multitude had returned to Nineveh. The fire worshippers from the mountain, the astrologers from Persia, and the priests from Ur, had left the mystic circle, the sacred altar, and the consecrated bower, and had returned to their respective homes, more than ever impressed with a sense of the greatness and glory of their fire-god.

As the young astrologer journeyed thoughtfully along, one of the high priests of the temple accosted him.

“ Abram, my son, didst thou find peace and happiness in the sacred bower?”

“ No, father,” rejoined Abram, “ not in the sacred bower, nor from the sacred tree nor holy altar, nor yet from the bright face of the god of fire.”

“ Whence then the radiance of thy countenance, which shone with such brightness on the festal day, and which even now is overspread with sunlight joy?”

“ O, holy father, I saw a form you could not see, whose glory outshone the sun, and in whose radiance the moon and stars would fade away into the dark-

ness of midnight. It was a manifestation of the Great Spirit, by whom the sun and moon and stars were made, the great first cause, himself causeless because unbegotten, the God over all and blessed forever."

"Did he speak to thee, my son?"

"Not in words of man's speaking, holy father. I heard no voice ; but from that radiant glory there came a mysterious spirit language which my soul understood. O ! the rapture of that hour. My soul was filled with most ecstatic bliss, and I knew it was the Great Unknown who appeared to me."

"Ah, my son, I fear it was an optical illusion produced on thy fevered imagination, a mere hallucination of thy mind, caused by the fire god, who loves to bewilder the senses of his devout worshippers. Thy deep thoughtfulness and seclusion for many days before the sacred festival, of which I have heard so much, has so wrought on thy nervousness as to exalt thy imagination beyond the range of sober reflection."

"Nay, father, I am fully persuaded of what I saw, and I know by direct inward consciousness that God, the God of heaven, has appeared to me. The vision of the temple is realized, the star of my destiny has risen to go down no more forever. Joy, joy, forever ! What for long years I sought, with a devotion you well know, holy father, in the adoration of the sun and the moon, and the study of the

stars, has at last come to my possession. Call it a delusion if you may, but the happiness I sought at last I have found."

"Will Abram forsake the gods of his fathers, whom all Assyria, Babylonia and Persia worship, to follow this strange light which has so bewildered his brain? Will he turn away from the holy fire and dash the sacred cup from his lips?"

"Nay, holy father, I but return to the worship of the one living and true God, which our fathers adored beyond the great flood, but whose glory was obscured and shut out from the sin-darkened vision of their descendants. This God they once knew, but not liking to retain his knowledge, their foolish imaginations became darkened and they turned aside to the worship of the creature instead of the Creator. The stars are but the stepping places up to his glorious throne, and the sun and moon but lamps to illumine the way."

"Thus saying, thou assumest a knowledge and authority beyond thy years. Go, my son, and learn from the records of the temple that it is not given to youth to speak thus condemningly of the religion of their country and kindred, but in all subjection to learn obedience to the powers that be, ordained of the sun, and observed by all the kings, priests, and astrologers of the realm."

So saying, he left him, and they continued their journey.

The events of the last few days had filled the mind of the young astrologer with profound emotions. The wild and restless sea of thought had been calmed by a power above all the influences of the gods of Assyria ; even transcending the secret rites of the priests in the temple of Ur, or the more mysterious ceremonies of the magicians in the temple of Belus at Babylon. The great Creator had revealed himself, and his all-pervading presence had filled his mind with a peace tranquil as heaven and boundless as eternity.

Though he no longer gazed upon the sun and moon and stars as his gods, yet they never seemed half so lovely in his sight. He looked upon these bright orbs, but as the creatures of Jehovah, and the reflections of his wisdom and power, forming a bright pathway up to his glorious throne on high. He was no longer left to spell out darkly in the works of nature his uncertain destiny, for revelation had given him a key by which all the mysteries in creation and providence were unlocked, and their most intricate and difficult problems were solved. He was not left to infer his immortality from the fact that he had entered the mystic circle and partaken of the holy cup, but he felt the new eternal life welling up from the deep fountains of his unsealed nature, and spreading rapture through all the chambers of his soul. Deeply versed as he was in the occult sciences, the study of which he pursued

with passionate fondness, the change which had come upon him, and the deep and powerful emotion which it excited, was far more absorbing than the lore of magic or the sublime study of the stars. Before, he could only dimly trace the footprints of the great Unknown in the earth and the heavens ; now he realized his presence and his power, and felt that he lived and moved in the great source of light and life, concerning whom

“The sun itself was but his shade.”

Before, he looked through nature vainly hoping to find God ; now, he looked through God upon nature, and the sun and moon and stars, and the earth, he saw to be the work of his hands.

Under such a happy transformation he returned to his father's house at Ur. It was not long until he made Terah, for that was his father's name, acquainted with the wonderful vision he had at Eden.

It is said, “the heart knoweth its own bitterness, and strangers intermeddle not with its joy.” His father, though a priest of the temple, did not know the disquietude and anxiety which brooded over the mind of his dutiful and affectionate son. He had frequently chided him for his unrest and the over-zealous devotion which had recently characterized his nocturnal studies. He saw that the vigils which he kept were making fearful inroads upon his frame, all of which were read in the pale cheek and trembling hand, but he knew nothing of the anxious

thoughts and gloomy fears that drank up his spirits. Deep in his own heart he hid his sorrows, which, like a worm in the bud of a beautiful flower, was working death to his expanding hopes. Sorrow shuns the world's cold gaze and courts retirement, and as the stricken deer seeks its native bower to bleed and die, so Abram had sought his grotto and spent whole nights in solitude and prayer.

Now that the night of his darkness and sorrow was past and the day of his joy had come, filling him with brighter visions than ever came to him in his happiest dreams, he would make others partake of his joy.

Into that father's anxious ear did he pour the tides of his full and joyous heart. Terah looked sad, for he feared that much study had deranged the mind of his dearest child. To avoid this dreaded result he had sent him away with the young priests and astrologers to Eden, that amid the gay throng that would gather there, and the exciting scenes of the sacred festival of the sun, his mind might recover its wonted tone, that thus restored he might be the same joyous youth he was in other days.

"Why does sadness cloud my father's brow? Such happiness to thy son should not make thee melancholy."

"Ah, my son," said the anxious parent, "if it were real happiness I could rejoice with thee, but I fear with priest Benoni that thou art walking in the

sparks of thine own kindling, and not rejoicing under the inspiration of what thou callest the Great Spirit. Others have been smitten by the sun and moon, and thy strange furor may have been occasioned in the same way. Were it so I would rejoice, for whom the gods of fire and light love, are often thus entranced.”

The father was evidently as much a stranger to the elevation of mind enjoyed by the son as he was of the source whence it emanated, and hence could not enter into his feelings or partake of his joy. It was a new and strange development, and as there did not seem to be any aberration of mind in regard to other subjects, but rather, if any thing, an increased clearness and strength of intellect, connected with a quietude and peace to which the father knew he had been a stranger for some months past, the whole thing was invested with a mystery which the aged priest and magician was unable to solve.

To the patriarch it was a new manifestation, a new religion, for ever since Cain was driven from the face of the Lord at the place of worship on the east of Eden, where stood the cherubim and the infolding fire, had he and all his descendants turned to the sun, and stretching out his hands, worshipped God in that bright orb. So, in the days of Enos and Seth and *Tubal Cain*, did they worship the Great Spirit through the sun, and as the moon and stars were placed on high to be the regulators of the

universe, were they also worthy of being praised and glorified, and they built temples to the stars, and looked up adoringly to the host of heaven.

To the mind of Terah, however, there was one thought which seemed like a forgotten dream revived by the singular experience of his son. He had heard of a chosen few among his ancestors of whom it was said they were taken into the secret counsels of the Great Spirit, and that they refused to worship the hosts of heaven. The names of these illustrious patriarchs were Enoch, Methuselah, Noah, Shem, and Eber, the former of whom had particularly special interviews with God, walking and talking with him face to face as man would hold converse with his fellow man, and who was finally carried away, soul and body, to the grand council of heaven.

Ancient tradition informed him, that years after the translation of Enoch, the patriarch Noah and his family were preserved in an ark from the great flood which destroyed the rest of mankind. He had also heard of Job, a priest and prince of great wealth and influence in Arabia, who, in answer to those that called in question his integrity, said "If I beheld the sun when it shined or the moon walking in brightness, and my heart hath been secretly enticed, or my mouth hath kissed my hand, I should have denied the God that is above." He had heard also of a mysterious priest who dwelt at Salem, in the

land of Canaan, who was also called a prince of peace. While dwelling upon these reflections he became more than ever interested in the wonderful recital of his son.

“Can it be,” said he to himself, “that God will appear and make himself known to mortals. Can the ineffable light and glory be so veiled as to be seen by human eyes? Surely none by searching can find out the Almighty; and if any are thus favored, it must be by divine manifestations.”

What was hidden from the father and the aged priests and astrologers, and was lost amid the corruptions of Assyrian worship, was revealed and restored to the son. Being unable to convince his father and the priests of the temple, of the reality of the wonderful revelation, Abram sought his wonted retirement in the grotto, and held communion with the Father of his spirit.

A grand festival was to be held at Nineveh, in honor of her proud and mighty king. Weeks were spent in making preparations, which were on the most magnificent scale. To this brilliant *fete*, princes and nobles from Babylon, with priests and astrologers from Ur, and the magi from Ispahan, were invited. Expectation was raised to its highest pitch, and all anticipated the rarest enjoyment.

The invitation extended to the astrologers of Ur would of course include the young and gifted Abram, and he contemplated the visit with no ordinary de-

gree of pleasure, as it would afford him not only an opportunity to see the vast metropolis of Assyria, and furnish him an occasion for becoming acquainted with its astrologers, but the hope was strongly indulged that perchance he might meet the idol of his heart, his beloved Sarai, to whom he had already plighted his vows, and whom at Eden he had promised to visit whenever opportunity should present.

The journey was to be accomplished by water, and boats were prepared for that purpose. Every thing being in readiness, and the time having arrived, the party embarked, and the fleet being loosed from its moorings at the quay, gently glided down the Tigris.

The scenery along the banks, always beautiful, presented at this season of the year a peculiarly attractive appearance. The valley on either side, spread out in gentle undulations, was covered with plants and flowers of every hue. The grass and shrubs which skirted the margin of the river down to the water's edge, made the stream appear in its meanderings to flow through beds of living green. On the west, far over the magnificent plains of Mesopotamia, the dim outlines of the huge tower of Belus, with its astronomical observatory, surmounted by the colossol silver statue of Jupiter Ammon, could be seen as it were sculptured on the deep blue of the sky. On the east rose the lofty summits of the Tiyari, covered with trees and herbage.

The sight of the observatory at Babylon occasioned a lengthy discussion among the astrologers and priests in regard to the recent discovery which had been made in the planetary world. The chief astrologer of Babylon had discovered a new star, which possessed a form and shone with a dazzling brilliancy different from any which had been found in the astrological annals. It assumed ever and anon mysterious forms, now radiating an intense brightness, and then, as if unable to support its splendor, fading away until its light was like that of another star. An account of it had been written out and sent to the king and the various astrologers in Babylonia and Chaldea, but as yet none were able to give it a name, or decypher its meaning. It seemed to have taken the place of the lost Pleiad, one of the holy seven.

While engaged in these speculations the time passed quickly and pleasantly away, and the boats neared the place of their destination.

At length on the eve of the grand festival, the walls and towers of Nineveh appeared in view. It was approaching the noon of night on the second day after their departure from Ur, as they neared the gates of the proud capital which opened from the east and west. The lights which streamed out from the fifteen hundred lofty towers on the walls, seemed to the approaching company like a vast circle of burning stars hung around the city.

Having followed the course of the stream to the western side of the city, the party left their boats and entered the outer gates which opened upon the bank of the river. Within, the city was illuminated. Multitudes could be seen strolling through the pleasure gardens, while in many a palace as they passed on their way they witnessed brilliant illuminations, and heard the joyous shout of the gay revelers as they tripped to the notes of sackbut and harp, dulcimer and viol. Every heart seemed wild with joy at the arrival of the grand festival.

As they approached the king's palace, rising from terrace to terrace, a scene of magnificence burst upon their view, grand beyond description. This stately edifice occupied a large square in the center of the city. It stood on an elevated platform, and had two grand entrances, one on the east, looking out on the mountains, and the other on the west, overlooking the Tigris and the vast plain of Mesopotamia. The immense gateway formed by a pair of human headed bulls, fourteen feet long, wearing a lofty head dress richly ornamented with rosettes and edged with a fringe of feathers, opened, as we have already seen, to the west. The entrance formed by these colossal bulls was fifteen feet wide. It was paved with large slabs of limestone. To the right and left stretched away the walls and lofty towers of the city. Through this gateway a continued stream of human life was passing. Behind

these colossal figures, and between the outer and inner face of the gateway, were two chambers seventy feet long and twenty-three feet wide.— Beyond the first gate were two others, guarded by human headed bulls and winged lions. After ascending several terraces, by means of flights of steps made of immense squared stones, flanked with buttresses, on which at regular intervals were colossal human headed lions and bulls, the party reached the propylæum at the foot of a wider and more magnificent flight, composed of alabaster slabs elaborately sculptured with many a curious design. On a monolith, at the base of this flight, were placed two immense lions whose fierce aspect, as they stood revealed in the light of the grand hall above, struck terror to the minds of those who were unaccustomed to gaze upon such grim colossal guards. The propylæum was covered with square slabs of alabaster, pure and white, ornamented with the most rich and beautiful sculptures. At the grand entrance hall, which was arched and supported by immense pillars, stood two enormous human headed sphinxes, while on either side in the wall were sculptured human headed winged lions and bulls ; next to which were six human figures of gigantic proportions.

Passing the grand portal they found themselves in an immense hall, hundreds of feet in length and breadth, and rising up from columns to a great height. The roof was flat, and that part of it im-

mediately over the center of the hall was consecrated to the priests, where they kept the holy fire burning day and night, and offered up their sacrifices to the hosts of heaven. This place could be reached from the different entrances by a circular stairway. Around this hall were three others on an equal scale of magnificence though not of the same immense size. Above and adjoining these were chambers spread out in every direction, amounting to seventy in number, the floors and walls of which were composed of alabaster, sculptured like those of the grand hall. The ceilings were finished with cedar from Lebanon, acacia wood from Horeb and Sinai, and fir from the Tiyari. Surrounding the whole immense pile were columns of white granite supporting entablatures richly ornamented with every Assyrian device.

In a recess formed by columns stood the throne of the king upon an elevated platform. This throne was supported by three rows of figures, one above the other. The wood was most richly and elaborately carved and inlaid with gold and ivory. The legs of the throne ended in pine shaped ornaments. Over the high back was thrown an embroidered robe of the most rare and beautiful material. The footstool was of the most elegant form, and encased with gold, the legs ending in lion's paws.

On this throne was seated the proud monarch of Nineveh, and around him were the thousands of the

princes, priests and astrologers of Assyria. On this night he was attired in a style of gorgeous magnificence. Long loose sacrificial robes of the richest purple, highly ornamented with crescents and stars of gems and gold, and edged with tassels and fringes, surrounded his person. On this occasion the king wore a conical shaped tiara or crown on his head, somewhat resembling the mitre of a high priest, ornamented with crescents and stars of gold and gems so arranged as to represent the constellations. Round his neck were hung the four sacred signs, the crescent, the star, the bident, and the horned cap. In front of the throne, on the alabaster pavement, was sculptured a crescent in the midst of a many rayed star representing the sun and moon. Immediately in the rear of this was a table containing many sacrificial objects, and adjoining was the holy altar on which burned the sacred flame. Around this in the rear stood the priests in semi-circular form, arrayed in sacerdotal robes, while around the whole was inscribed the mystic circle.

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The midnight ceremonies of the grand festival were being performed, and just as Abram and his companions took their stations around the circle, the high priest from a burning censer lighted the sacred urn upon the altar, and elevating the consecrated cup, blessed it, and presenting it to the king, who drank of its sacred contents, it was passed around among those within and those without the circle.

The young astrologer from Ur did not partake of that cup. He had pledged faith and obedience to another God, and he could no more partake of an idolatrous sacrament than he could worship the gods for whom it was instituted. He had entered into covenant with the God of heaven, and he could not recognize the gods of Assyria as the objects of his worship.

There was one in that vast and brilliant assembly whose gaze was fixed upon the young astrologer from the time he entered the hall. In an apartment dedicated to the queen and the noble ladies of her court, which was somewhat elevated above the marble floor and on a level with the throne, sat a young and lovely princess, whose sad and thoughtful countenance indicated the deep reverie of her soul.

“Can it be,” thought she, “that Abram has renounced the religion of our fathers? If not, why does he refuse the sacramental cup? But he seems to be troubled. A shade of sadness is on his brow. Would that I knew his thoughts. O that I could speak to him.”

While thus she mused with eyes intently fixed on the subject of her thoughts, Abram cast a glance at the gallery, and as eye met eye in mutual recognition, quick as the electric flash along the conducting medium, there was an intercommunion of soul. The mysterious affinity which bound their hearts together annihilated the distance between them, and that lan-

guage which is known and interpreted only by the spirit, at once became the medium of communication between those loving hearts.

The sacramental service being ended, the king rose from his throne and presenting his scepter, every head was bowed to do him reverence, while a shout went up from that vast assembly which reverberated through the lofty dome and was echoed from the surrounding chambers, "O king! live forever." Then laying aside his scepter and touching his lips gently in token of silence, every voice was hushed and deep earnest attention sat on every countenance. Addressing the listening throng, he said,

"O, princes and rulers, priests, astrologers, and magicians, my most worthy servants and safe-guards of Assyria, a new star has appeared, a new god has taken his throne in the heavens, outshining Orion and the Pleiades, and to the chief astrologer Aram, it seems even brighter than Venus, though far beyond its orbit. It doubtless heralds the approach and has marked the birth of some distinguished prince, or it may be some rival king. If any one can tell me the sign of this star and what it meaneth in astrology, his desire shall be granted even to the richest province of my realm."

It was a moment of intense interest, especially to every astrologer assembled there. The astrologers of Babylon, from the depths of whose astronomical well the star had been discovered, had searched all

the records in the temple of Belus, but, as before remarked, unable to solve the mystery of the strange appearance of the wonderful star, were dumb. The eastern magi, whose deep astrological researches caused them to vie with the astrologers of Assyria, and the astrologers of Nineveh who had searched the chambers of record and had unrolled all the annals of antiquity, were alike unable to give a satisfactory answer to the king.

Abram had been to Babylon, and from the well and observatory of the temple had gazed upon the mysterious orb. His intense devotion to the study of the science had secured for him a name and a fame as an astrologer which extended beyond the circle of astronomers attached to the observatory in his native city, and no sooner had Aram discovered the celestial visitant than he sent for the youthful astrologer. He was therefore perfectly aware of the interest its appearance had excited among all classes, and from what he had learned, knew that it would claim the attention of the king and court of Nineveh at the festival. To him the star bore a greater resemblance to the blazing fire on the summit of the temple of Ur, than to the soft luminous rays which radiated from the other stars in the heavens. As the result of his observations he came to the conclusion that it was not a new star, but from its position, must be one belonging to the constellation in which it was discovered, and that it only assumed a

new appearance by mysteriously robing itself in garments of fire. The meaning of this he could only conjecture or explain by the hypothesis that it was a star of some proud monarch's destiny, and its conflagration and consequent final extinction indicated the fate of a king and his empire.

There, before the king and astrologers, were the astronomical tables and legends of Babylon. The astronomical records of Persia were also introduced, embracing the researches made in India and China. Before the king were the ancient annals of Nineveh, but in none of them was to be found an answer or a clue to the solution of the royal question. All acknowledged their inability to unravel the mystery connected with the strange and wonderful star.

At this crisis Abram gently advanced, and bowing courteously to the king, said in a tremulous voice, "O king, live forever! To me it is given to answer thy question. The star is not a strange messenger heralding the birth of a king or the invasion of a rival, but a star of destiny, whose fiery glare is a sign of desolation and final ruin. It is the *Mene, Mene, Tekel*, of some doomed monarch and his empire."

At this announcement the eyes of the king, which until now had been riveted on the prophet-astrologer, grew dim and glassy, his head fell upon his shoulder, his hands trembled, and a shudder passed over his whole frame.

After his emotion had somewhat subsided, he rose from his throne, and extending his scepter to Abram, exclaimed,

“ O princes, rulers, astrologers, and magicians, I do now decree that Abram be constituted, by royal authority, the chief astrologer of my realm, inasmuch as he hath a wiser spirit than ye all.”

Then said he to Abram, “ Ask, my son, what thou wilt and it shall be given to thee, even to the half of my kingdom. The gods have given thee wisdom above thy years, and thou shalt have whatsoever thou dost desire.”

Every eye was now turned upon the young astrologer of Ur, and as the Archimagus or Grand Master of Babylon advanced and delivered the jewels of his office to the king, who placed them with his own hands upon the person of Abram, every one in that brilliant assemblage did him homage, while the astrologers and magicians paid grand honors to their newly invested chief. When the ceremonies of installation were ended, the prophet-astrologer turned with joyous and thankful heart, and approached the young and beautiful princess who stood among the nobility of her sex a deeply interested spectator of the scene.

She was, as we have already remarked, a blue eyed maiden, of unusual beauty and symmetry of form. Often did the young astrologers and priests of her native city, Ur, gaze upon her as she would

glide to and from her bower at eve beneath the silver light of the moon, to worship the hosts of heaven ; or at early morn, as with fixed and steady eye she would watch the rising of the god of fire as his beams would first kiss the distant mountains.

She was now away from her loved home, but happy memories of other days ceased not to awaken the most pleasant associations. As a princess, she was arrayed in a style of magnificence suited to her rank. A rich robe of crimson elaborately decorated with gems, hung gracefully over her well rounded shoulders. Dark glossy tresses fell in curls on her inclined neck of snowy whiteness. On her head was a turban of the richest silk, in the center of which was a gold star radiated with diamonds. To the youthful astrologer she was a prize more valuable than all the wealth and power and glory of Assyria. Every eye was fixed upon the now young prince and princess, and as Abram took her by the hand and led her to the mystic circle, in front of the throne, every heart partook of the general joy. Presenting her to the king, he said with a voice tremulous with emotion, " O, king, I accept thy generous offer. I ask not to be the ruler of a realm : I ask not wealth nor power ; but I ask, as the betrothed of my heart, she who stands before you, my loved and long lost Sarai."

" Thy desire is granted," said the king, and rising from his throne and joining their hands, he pro-

nounced them husband and wife, in the name of the sun. Then embracing and kissing them, he added, "On Abram and Sarai may the gods of Assyria shed their mildest rays. May the stars of their destiny never grow dim or expire."

Though the king was evidently troubled, as the interpretation of Abram augured no good to his destiny and that of his empire, yet he ordered music and dancing. Flowers were strewn in thick profusion by fair hands, on the tessellated floor in front of the happy pair as they walked arm in arm among the joyous throng to receive their greetings. The sacred dance, — for all the amusements of the Assyrians partook of a religious character, — then began, and all partook of the general joy, which ceased not to reverberate through the halls of the palace until the rising of the god of fire ended the roval festival.

CHAPTER III.

THE TEMPLE AT BABYLON.

THE ancient city of Babylon was located on the plain of Shinar on the eastern and western banks of the Euphrates. It was laid out on a magnificent scale, the streets crossing each other at right angles, and the river running through the center. The city on each side of the river was enclosed by a high wall, fifteen miles in length, making the entire circuit of the city about sixty miles of continuous wall. These walls were of the enormous thickness of eighty-seven feet, rising up to a height of three hundred feet. They were pierced at regular intervals by a hundred gates of solid brass, each one of which was guarded by towers erected on the walls surmounting the gates. The wide straight streets extended through the city on a line with the gates. These streets divided Babylon into seventy-six squares, each of which was two miles and a quarter in circumference. These squares constituted separate villas, many of which were used as parks or pleasure gardens, filled with trees and flowers. The king's palace was erected on both sides of the river, the separate apartments of which were connected by a bridge. One portion of the palace next to the

temple of Belus, was on the west side of the river. This was first erected, and denominated the old palace; the new was on the opposite side of the river, the enclosure and pleasure grounds of which covered a space of eight or ten miles. In after years, this enclosure, history informs us was decorated with hanging gardens supported by voluted pillars with elaborately carved capitals, rising from terrace to terrace, higher than the walls of the city.

The temple of Belus, at Babylon, was situated on the eastern bank of the river Euphrates. This temple occupied a square a quarter of a mile in extent, in the center of which rose a tower six hundred feet in height. The tower was pyramidal, and divided at regular intervals into eight separate towers, rising successively one above another, decreasing in dimensions to the summit, where there was an oratory containing a couch, table, and other articles, all of pure gold. Here the principal devotions were performed. Immediately over this, on the highest platform of all, was the astronomical observatory by means of which, and the astronomical well adjoining the tower at its base, and connected with it by an underground passage, the astrologers arrived at such perfection in the science, that astronomical observations were kept dating back to within one hundred years of the flood.

On the summit of the topmost tower were three golden statues representing the celestial deities,

Jupiter, Juno, and Rhea. These statues were all of colossal proportions, that of Jupiter being forty feet high. Juno was represented as seated on a golden throne, with lions at each knee, and two enormous serpents of silver. The statue of Rhea was on the left side of Jupiter. She was represented as grasping a serpent in her right hand, and a scepter enriched with gems in her left. Accompanying these statues was a table of wrought gold, forty feet long and fifteen wide, on which were goblets and vases of the most massy and elaborate workmanship. The temple was filled with immense treasures, the wealth of kings and conquered countries, and little did Abram think as he entered with his beloved Sarai the palace allotted to the chief astrologer, that the time would come when his descendants would be captives in Babylon, and their most sacred treasures would be deposited in that very temple consecrated to idolatrous gods.

He came not, however, to Babylon as a priest, but as an astrologer, and his relation to the king and court of Nineveh, of which Babylon was then a province, Nineveh being the metropolitan city of the Assyrian empire, was not such as to require of him either the acknowledgment or worship of the gods. He came with his young and beautiful princess to enter upon his duties as chief astrologer in the temple of Belus, not as a worshipper of the sun or moon, or stars, or Jupiter, Juno, or Rhea, but as a wor-

shipper of the God of heaven, of him who made the sun and moon and seven stars, and Orion and his wife had already embraced the same faith and worship, and was illumined with the same holy light, and felt the same mysterious all-pervading power.

We have not omitted the incidents connected with his return from Nineveh to Ur, and the intense excitement produced by his exaltation to the high post of honor conferred upon him, among his kindred and the citizens of his native place, because there was nothing that would be interesting in the narrative, — far from it, but we have omitted their narration as we must many other things possessing equally thrilling interest and importance, though not essential to our history.

Scarcely had the astrologer taken possession of his new home until another remarkable event occurred in the history of his life, destined in its results to have a more wonderful effect upon him than any other occurrence connected with his most eventful life. As the shadows of evening were gathering around the city, and the stars one by one were making their appearance in the sky, Abram and Sarai ascended the tower, and reaching the oratory, they prepared to engage in their evening devotions. They were far above the din and roar of the city, which stretched beyond the temple area on either side for miles up and down, on both sides of the river. The Euphrates reflected the light of the

stars from its unruffled bosom, and the vast reservoir beyond the walls seemed to the spectator like a field of stars, so faithfully were the celestial orbs mirrored in its waters. On the summit of that lofty tower rose the mighty statue of Jupiter, glistening in the rays of the moon.

“How beautiful!” said Sarai, as she leaned against the balcony and gazed upon the scene.

“Most beautiful,” replied Abram thoughtfully. “Yonder moon, walking majestically among the glittering orbs that deck the brow of night, fitly represents the milder glory of Him who is brighter and greater than the sun shining in his strength, or the moon walking in her brightness and beauty, and serves to lead the thoughts of man at evening hour up to his glorious throne. Let us bow and bless that God who hath formed all these bright creations as exhibitions of his eternal power.”

So saying, the happy pair prostrated themselves before the God of heaven. From those pious hearts, strongly united by sympathy, there rose a deep and ardent devotion, and a strong faith, lively gratitude, fervent love, and ardent hope, all-pervading and powerful, took possession of their souls. Thus absorbed, their spirits rose to high and glorious sympathy with the divine mind, and they held communion with the invisible One. The divine glory came over them, and there appeared the same manifestation that fell upon the vision of Abram in

Eden. While thus entranced, a voice, soft and low as the breath of summer, was heard saying, "Arise, this is not your rest, and go to a land of which I will tell you." Abram was startled. It was the first time the divine voice had fallen upon his ear. But he was not alarmed. That voice fell upon an ear already attuned to the language of heaven. Those words came to a heart full of faith and obedience to God, and when they rose from the altar, a calm celestial resignation to the divine will might have been seen upon their countenances, indicating the response of their hearts.

The revelation was clear, so clear and definite that it left no doubt whatever on the mind of Abram that he was to leave his post of honor, his much loved pursuit, his palace, and more than all, his kindred and friends and native country, and all the associations of his early life, and start out upon a pilgrimage to him unknown.

But was he to wander alone as an exile from kindred and country and friends? No, not alone, God said "I will go with thee and give thee rest." And Sarai too, for they twain were one, would accompany him. No sooner did the faithful Abram respond to the voice of God than his young and beauteous wife, all radiant with smiles, embracing him, said, "whither thou goest I will go, even to the ends of the earth."

After remaining a few days at Babylon, Abram

returned to Ur, and communicated to his father and kinsmen the divine command. Terah had embraced the religion of his son. Nahor and Haran had also become proselytes to the new faith. Terah was now two hundred years old, and was resignedly awaiting his departure to the home of the blest as the evening shades of life were gathering around him. No sooner, however, did he hear of the faith of his children and their divinely appointed destiny, than he resolved to accompany them. It was a heavenly mission, and he knew that it would have the divine protection. He had made the God of his children his own God. He had abandoned the star and fire worship of Chaldea for a purer, simpler faith. Enfeebled with age as he was, he did not hesitate to start upon the long and weary journey, and with staff in hand nerved by a new power, he started out with Abram and Sarai for the land of promise.

Crossing the Tigris, and giving themselves up to divine direction, they traveled in a north-eastwardly course until they reached the mountain range. — Worn down with fatigue and toil, Terah was at length compelled to cease traveling, and after having reached a beautiful valley in Armenia they pitched their tents and called a halt until Providence should further open their way. They had traveled a distance of three hundred and seventy-six miles, and were weary of the journey.

In that little band there was a promising youth,

who, having embraced the same faith, had resolved on undertaking the same pilgrimage. He was a brother's son of Abram, and though much younger, was of kindred spirit, and devotedly attached to his uncle. For the sake of his religion he was willing to leave father and mother and his youthful associates, and travel with the chosen few to the land of promise. His name was Lot.

In the place where they had stopped on account of the infirmities of Terah, Abram and his nephew commenced the erection of a village which was called by them Haran, in honor of Lot's father. It was a lovely spot. Nature had here lavished her gifts, and with a profuse hand had scattered blessings all around. As the blessing of God was upon Abram and his companions, every enterprize in which they engaged prospered. The little band was increased by additions from their fellow countrymen, for they were still in Mesopotamia, and had not passed beyond the boundaries of their native land. They bestowed great attention to the cultivation of the soil, which produced spontaneously the most odoriferous vines, and it was not many years until they had immense vineyards and vast herds and flocks of cattle and sheep which grazed on the rich pastures which nature had so bountifully provided.

An event calculated to fill the mind with melancholy, and which broke in fearfully upon the happi-

ness of the peaceful village of Haran, occurred. The aged patriarch, Terah, whose increasing feebleness caused Abram to stop in his unknown journey, an event which resulted in the foundation of a city and the accumulation of a large amount of property, was called to die. He was well stricken in years. The toils of upwards of two centuries had worn him down to the grave, and calling around him his beloved Abram and Sarai, and pronouncing upon them his blessing, he gathered up his feet and departed in peace to his fathers. The hands of affection closed his eyes, and followed by those who loved him in life, and in death did not forsake him, together with a large train of weeping villagers, the patriarch of Haran was borne to the tomb.

It was a sad day to Abram and Sarai and Lot, who with his newly married companion, deeply mourned his loss. The first grave opened in Haran, it was baptized with many tears, and often at eventide would Abram and Sarai wander there to weep and pray over the tomb of buried affection. Once, while pouring out their hearts to God at that rural spot, the divine glory again overshadowed them as on the summit of Belus, and a voice came to them, saying, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, into a land that I will show thee, and I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee and make thy name great, and thou shalt be a blessing, and I will

bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee, and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed." It was the same divine voice whose directions they had followed, and which had led them to Haran, and hence it took them no time to consult in regard to obeying the command. Preparations were immediately made for another unknown journey, and a few days, in which they gathered together their flocks and herds and treasures, witnessed their departure, with Lot and his wife, and those who had renounced idolatry and embraced the true religion. Though they had laid the foundations of a city, and in the course of fourteen years procured for themselves every thing necessary to make home happy, and though last not least, Haran contained the sacred relics of their venerated father, they were ready to make any sacrifices, leaving all the endearments of home, with their fruitful vineyards and smiling gardens, for the deep shadows of an untrodden wilderness.

Their route lay towards Canaan, and after many days of weary travel over rugged mountains, through deep and dangerous ravines and sandy deserts, they at length reach the borders of the promised land, and finally enter the beautiful vale of Shechem, spread out between the mountains of Ebal and Gerezim, where they encamped and erected an altar to the worship of God. Nothing could be more lovely than this capacious valley, extending

as it did for a long distance between the mountains of Ebal and Gerezim, which rose on either side to the height of eight hundred feet, thickly covered with groves of olive and fig trees, while the rocks were festooned with vines and flowers of every hue, between which natural fountains threw out their sparkling waters, imparting a refreshing coolness to the scene. Nothing could be more inviting. Here the heaven-directed travelers, after having journeyed four hundred miles, ended their pilgrimage and took up their abode.

Again the Lord appeared unto Abram. While engaged in evening devotions, and the smoke of the sacrifice went curling up from the altar as a pure incense to heaven, the Shekinah again enveloped the worshippers, and the divine voice said, "Unto thy seed will I give this land."

Abram was childless. Year after year had come and gone since he took his beloved Sarai to his bosom, but the boon for which both had sighed, and the withholding of which in those days was considered as a curse, came not to gladden their hearts and light their eyes. To write a man childless in patriarchal times was but to complete the sum of his misery. It was to make him as a lone tree in a dreary desert, branchless, leafless, sapless. But this revelation inspired hope, and the faithful Abram believed God, and rejoiced in the prospect of its fulfilment. It was a promise involving the

existence and destiny of a nation, numerous as the stars of heaven. That same valley and those towering mountains were to be covered and darkened by twelve tribes and their twelve times twelve thousand that should spring from his loins, and every ear which should hear the commandments of his God. That very valley where he offered up his sacrifices as typical of a coming Savior, whom he already beheld by faith in the dim vista of the future, was to be made sacred by his presence. His feet were to tread the same green spot, and his lips to taste of the same cooling waters. The faith of Abram saw all nations of the earth blessed in the promised Messiah, for though

“Impervious shadows hide
The mysteries of heaven,
Yet where all knowledge is denied
To faith 'tis given.”

And his faith brought to him not only the knowledge of redemption's scheme, but secured for him all its spiritual and eternal blessings. Centuries upon centuries were to pass away, sacred bards were to live and sing of the Messiah, mighty kings and priests were to wait for his advent, and all nations were to desire his coming; but the prophet would drop his harp, the king lay down his crown, and the priest his mitre, and the nations die ere the fulness of time should come, while faith annihilated

all distance of time and space, and brought to Abram's vision the Glorious One.

Northward from the valley of Shechim, a distance of twenty-eight miles, spread out the broad plain of Mamre, between Bethel and Ai. It was a wild romantic region, covered with lofty oaks, and though less fertile and beautiful than the valley of Moreh where the chosen few had taken up their abode, still it was in the land which God had promised to Abram ; and as the whole country was before him where to choose, with Providence his guide, from some cause which the sacred historian has wisely concealed, the holy family emigrated thither, taking with them their numerous servants, with their flocks and herds.

It might have been that such a place was not favorable to devotion. The Canaanite was still in the land, and encroachments from these idolaters might have rendered it necessary for the peaceful Abram to remove to a less favored but still more secluded spot. Or it might have been that the valley was not sufficiently broad and extensive for the already large and accumulating families of Abram and Lot, with their vast possessions of servants and cattle. Or what is perhaps the more plausible conjecture, the same divine voice which had called him from Babylon and directed him in his journeyings to Canaan, had summoned him to the highlands of Mamre.

Notwithstanding his removal from the vale of Shechem and plains of Moreh, to the more rugged heights of Mamre, yet he realized that He who had called him from Chaldea would give him in due time all the land of Palestine, and though the prospect and promise would have chilled the heart of others of less faith, and caused them to stagger with unbelief in regard to their fulfilment and realization, his faith stood like a pillar of light amid the surrounding darkness, penetrating the gloom and kindling the future with a radiance all-inspiring to hope.

Though the woody highlands afforded a wide range for the cattle, yet the soil was of too rough, rocky and sterile a character to yield a sufficient pasturage, and the families found it necessary to follow the indications of Providence and seek a more fertile spot. Their flocks and herds, under the divine blessing, had increased astonishingly, dotting the surrounding plains and darkening the encircling hills, and as it was necessary for their support that a more propitious region should be found, Abram and Lot struck their tents and journeyed south until they came to a section of country offering every inducement for their sojourn.

Here they pitched their tents, erected their altar, and offered up sacrifices and praises to the God of their mercies, whose providence had presided in such a wonderful manner over their journeyings since leaving the land of their nativity. Their toil

in the fields soon began to yield its fruit, and a rich harvest of plenty crowned their labors. The mountain, valley, and plain, which presented their diversified scenery to their enchanted eyes, filled their hearts with new and increased emotions of gratitude to the Giver of all good. As they would wander among the bowers, and at noontide rest beneath the feathery palm and wide-spreading olive, or at even, when the stars would look out clear and beautiful from their native heavens, they would gather around the sacred altar and offer the evening sacrifice, a holy joy would fill their hearts as the object of their worship would encircle them in a halo of glory, and from his radiant throne hold communion with their spirits.

To Abram there was a joy added to all the communings of his spirit with his God, and the great prosperity which attended him, only less than the first as a cause of happiness, and vastly greater than all the rest. It was the love of his affectionate wife. For though he had immense possessions, numerous relations, and a host of attendants and servants, there was nothing like his beloved Sarai, and no eye greeted him with half the affection of her mild blue orbs, nor did any voice sound so sweet as hers. When they would walk together at even, arm in arm, with true oriental simplicity, and gaze upon the moon walking in brightness over the bright pathway of stars, and call to remembrance

their past devotions when they vainly imagined that these bright orbs of night were their gods, and contrasted the doubt and uncertainty which filled their minds, with their present consciousness of hope and joy derived from the worship of their Creator, they were filled with ecstatic bliss, and would break forth in songs of praise to the God of heaven.

Sarai was a true wife, making home happy by her presence and her smiles, a very earthly paradise where the curse of strife never was permitted to enter. In her peaceful tent the pilgrim forgot his toil and exile, and was made to reap the full enjoyment of the present, while he was inspired with hope in the divine promise for the future. All around smiled an Eden of peace and joy, while above them was a *covenant*-keeping God, and over them his protecting care.

But life has its varieties as nature has her seasons, her storms, and sunshine. The morning sun may gild a cloudless sky, but ere noon it may be overcast with dark and lowering clouds. The cheerful day may be succeeded by a cheerless, gloomy night; and thus it was with the happy dwellers in the peaceful vales of Canaan. For a season, at least, their earthly happiness must be broken in upon, and their temporal resources must be in a measure exhausted, if for nothing else than to teach the dwellers of earth that this is not their home, but that at best they are strangers and pilgrims in quest of a country beyond

the skies, and that God only can satisfy the soul, while it is from His hand all temporal blessings flow. What profit are extensive flocks and herds if the pastures be dry? Of what avail are the olive, the fig, and the vine, dotting the plains and spreading over the surrounding hills, if the rains descend not to water the earth? What are all the luxuries of the most charming and beautiful home if they are soon to exist only in painful contrast with the most sudden and utter desolation? What are the flowers which bloom with such fragrance to-day, if we must see them all scattered and withered to-morrow? What are all the bright and beautiful pictures of human happiness, if we must soon weep over them like departed joys which never can return?

Such was to be the lot of the pilgrims of Palestine, so far as their happiness was derived from the earthly objects by which they were surrounded. They were destined to experience the sad reverse of fortune and suffer the pinching hand of a desolating famine to grasp them in its bony fingers. The clouds gave no rain, and the earth yielded no moisture. The grass withered beneath the scorching rays of the sun, and the rich fruits faded away from the field.

But God left not his chosen ones to perish. He "who guides Arcturus with his suns," in their pathway through the heavens, and upholds all things by the word of his power, directing and controlling

all events, in whose hands are the destinies of nations, could not if he would and would not if he could, so wise and good and kind is he in all his dealings, forsake those who put their trust in Him. Such an idea would not only be preposterous, but blasphemous in the extreme. He had called Abram from his country and kindred to enter upon a mission, the object of which was to work out a glorious destiny for a race which was to be numerous as the stars of heaven for multitude, and the covenant which he entered into with that faithful agent of his purposes, he intended to ratify before the world.

The seeming obscuration of hope in the darkness which was permitted to envelop his condition, was designed only as an additional test of a faith which had already been tried and found to be as the pure gold which passes through the fire. His trial was only to be as the night of gloom which precedes the bright and cheerful morning over which no cloud should cast a shade. It was to develop a greater moral strength and heroism in a soul already nerved up to deeds of bold and lofty daring, enabling it to grapple successfully with opposing obstacles and come out a triumphant victor, crowned with the achievements its own integrity and energy had secured.

Many, under such circumstances, would have given themselves up to despair, and considered all as lost. Not so with Abram. Though he was

aware of the fact that the whole land of Palestine was thus withering under a drought that had exhausted every green thing, and though he was conscious of the fact that soon his resources would be exhausted by the constant drain upon them which his hospitality and benevolence opened for the destitute in the surrounding country, yet he did not yield to despondency, or for a moment lose confidence in the ever acting providence of God.

CHAPTER IV.

COURT OF EGYPT.

ABRAM's knowledge of the country and climate of the East convinced him that the famine was general, and that no district dependent upon the rains for the productions of the soil, would afford supplies for his large and rapidly increasing family. To obtain these he must journey to another land.

In a southwesterly direction, two hundred and forty miles distant, was the country of Ham, the fertility of whose soil was produced by the annual inundation of a river which took its rise in the mountains of Ethiopia. This country was bounded on the north by the Great Sea, on the east by the river El Arish on the borders of Palestine and the Syrian or Arabian desert, which extends from the sea to the gulf of Suez, and from thence southward by the western coast of the Red Sea, and on the west by the Lybian desert. From the earliest ages its boundaries to the south had been fixed by the cataracts of Syene, which are formed by a number of granite rocks that stretch across the bed of the Nile, and over which that river rolled its foaming waters. The length of Egypt, from the mouth of its great river to the cataracts, the border of Nubia under the tropic of Can-

ser, was about five hundred miles. The valley of the river was narrow, the distance from mountain to mountain being only about seven miles.

The country of Egypt had attained a higher degree of civilization and refinement than even Assyria, the land of Abram. It was the seat of royal government, and the arts and sciences were carried to a greater extent of perfection than at Nineveh and Babylon. Besides, it was the granary of the world, possessing greater resources for the supply of its population than any other land. The peculiar fertility of its soil depending, as we have already stated, upon the inundation of the waters of the Nile: though no rain should fall on Egypt for a year, or a succession of years, yet the fields would yield their wonted supply. The various branches of the Nile have their rise in the mountains north of the equator, and flowing through Abyssinia and other regions westward of it, meet in the country of Sennaar. The united stream flows then in a northwesterly direction through Nubia and Egypt, and after a course of nearly two thousand miles from the farthest explored point, enters the Mediterranean by several mouths, which forms the Delta of Egypt. In a distance of one thousand three hundred miles from the mouth of the Lacazze to the Delta, the Nile does not receive a single tributary stream, which in the language of one, forms a solitary instance in the hydrographic history of the globe.

The ancients assigned many reasons for the rise of the waters of the Nile. To see the river rise and swell beyond its banks without a drop of rain, or any visible cause whatever, would necessarily excite many conjectures. They knew not that the vapors exhaled by the sun from the Mediterranean were carried to the mountains of Ethiopia, and there condensing, came down in copious showers, swelling the river to such an extent that, first Ethiopia and then Egypt, were overflowed, and the majestic river became a sea and spread abroad its blessings over the face of the surrounding country.

There cannot be a more magnificent sight than that which Egypt presents at two seasons of the year. In the months of July and August the whole valley is covered with water from mountain to mountain. In the midst of this sea numerous towns and villages appear, with several causeways leading from place to place, the whole interspersed with groves of orange and lemon trees, whose tops only are visible. This view is bounded by mountain ranges and woods, which terminate at the utmost distance the eye can discover, the most beautiful horizon that can be imagined. In the months of January and February the whole country is like one continued scene of beautiful meadows, whose verdure, enameled with flowers, charms the eye. The air is perfumed with the orange, lemon, and other blossoms, heightening, if possible, the enchantment of the scene.

The Nile being the source of Egypt's prosperity, the inhabitants were led to look upon it as the giver of all good, and hence they paid it divine honors. The priests of Egypt affirmed that Pheron, the son of Sesostris, one of their kings, was struck blind by the river god, for an act of impiety. At a certain time when the river had risen to the extraordinary height of twenty-seven feet, a violent storm of wind arose which greatly agitated the waters, the king, with a foolish temerity, took a javelin in his hand and cast it into the midst of the foaming waters, and for this act was struck with blindness.

The principal festival of this imaginary god was at the summer solstice, when the inundation commenced, at which season by a cruel idolatrous rite, the Egyptians sacrificed red haired persons, principally foreigners, to Typhon, or the power said to preside over tempests, at Busiris and Heliopolis, by burning them alive and scattering their ashes in the air.

Though of a more recent date than Nineveh and Babylon, the cities of Egypt were of great magnificence and splendor. The capital, which was called No Ammon, was situated on the banks of the Nile. It was the chief seat of the worship of Jupiter; and such its name denotes in the Egyptian tongue, as the secret invisible creator among the Egyptians was called Ammon, which signifies *hidden*. This was an appellation of the true God — “Why seekest

thou thus after my name, seeing it is secret," or hidden? This, also, accords with the inscription on one of Egypt's ancient temples, which reads, "I am all that hath been, and is, and will be, and my veil no mortal uncovered. My offspring is the sun."

This city was venerated by the ancient Egyptians as the parent city, the seat of sacred mysteries and learning. It had an hundred gates, from each of which ten thousand warriors issued with horses and chariots. The area of the city embraced twenty-seven Roman miles. Its palaces and monuments of art were magnificent without a parallel. The palace of Karnack, which was on the eastern side of the city, the largest edifice in Egypt, was seven hundred feet long and one hundred and twenty-five feet in breadth. Two ranges of columns led to a portico of one hundred and thirty-six columns. The two middle ranges of these columns were eleven feet in diameter; the remainder were seven feet. The length of the vestibule was three hundred and ninety feet, and the breadth one hundred and twenty-five. The vestibule led into a court where there were four obelisks and twelve colossal figures. Two other courts conducted to the apartments of the kings of Egypt. Adjoining the palace were spread out on every side extensive apartments, connecting therewith by avenues of sphynxes, lions and rams, all of colossal magnitude. The avenue to the temple of the sun was guarded by enormous human and lion

headed monsters, sixty feet high and one hundred and twenty-five feet long. Here mysteries were performed to which but few had access, and none were permitted to cross the threshold of that mysterious place, without previously passing through the most solemn rites.

Hitherward Abram and Sarai, with Lot and his wife, and their children, together with their numerous attendants, were wending their way. They had crossed the Syrian and Arabian deserts and reached the shores of the Nile. Their destination was the city of the king, as it was from him Abram hoped to obtain assistance. Aware, as he was, of the idolatry and profligacy of the king and his court, he resorted to an exceptionable expedient. What was to be done? Sarai his wife, though somewhat advanced in years, was still surpassingly beautiful. An increase of years had only given character to her expression of feature.

“If she go to the court of the king as my wife,” said Abram, “I shall be destroyed, and she taken as a wife by the king; but if she go as my sister, my life will not be sought on her account, and she may be saved. So saying, and fearing lest her beauty should become, to him and to her both, a snare, he finally said, “When Pharaoh shall ask thee who thou art? thou shalt say, ‘I am his sister.’ ” “Not thy wife, my lord, — and sister too?” said Sarai. “Nay, for if thou sayest aught but

that thou art my sister, they will slay me for thy sake. Besides, thou art my sister on my father's side."

The day at length arrived for entering Egypt's proud capital, and Abram and Sarai, after entering the city, and passing through the long colonnade, stood at the portal of the king's palace. He had already heard of Abram's fame as an astrologer in Chaldea, and no sooner did he learn who were in waiting, than he granted them an immediate audience. After learning the object of his visit, provision was at once made for his family, and he and Sarai were taken into the royal palace, where they were supplied with every luxury the fertile valley afforded.

The exceeding beauty of Sarai attracted the attention of all the lords and nobles of Pharaoh's court, and her peculiarly fascinating and attractive manners, added to a dignified yet amiable demeanor, won her a host of admirers on every hand. For her sake Abram was treated with marked respect, and his attainments in Assyrian lore soon gained for him among the priests and astrologers of the Egyptian court, an elevated position. Being the Archimagus of Babylon, and astrology having been introduced into Egypt from Chaldea, it was not to be wondered that Abram should meet with so much favor in the eyes of the learned. The Egyptians were, however, like his own countrymen, idolaters,

and worshippers of the sun and moon, under the names of Osiris and Isis. With their worship, however, they had connected mysteries peculiar to the occult sciences, and to these Abram was introduced, though at no time did he swerve from the true worship of God, and often did he enter into lengthy arguments to prove the folly of worshipping the creature instead of the Creator.

The king was specially delighted with his new guest, and loaded him with many costly presents, while at the same time he offered him a place among the princes and astrologers of the land. He had already taken his fair sister among the maids of honor, and she was undergoing that process of training peculiar to Eastern courts, whereby she would in due time become a sultana of the royal house.

The fears of Abram at last came upon him, but in a way he little suspected. Already had Pharaoh claimed Sarai as his own. To him it was a dark and dreadful day, a period of awful suspense, and the mind of Sarai was tossed with tumultuous feelings. They had involved themselves in a sad dilemma. With their own hands they had woven around their fate a web from which no human skill or power could extricate them. Sarai was at the mercy of a profligate court, and she trembled in view of her peril and approaching degradation. Under the circumstances Abram could

not, and dare not, interpose without involving himself and wife, if possible, in a still greater calamity, and he could not claim the Divine interposition, because he had not come to Egypt by the special direction of the Almighty ; it being only a general providence which pointed out his way. Notwithstanding all this, they both resorted to prayer and earnestly besought deliverance from the dreadful evil which threatened their happiness.

At length the day arrived which terminated the probation for her admission into the harem of the king, as one of his wives. Her rank and beauty were such as to create quite an excitement in the court, among the princes and ladies. The event which would fix her doom, and forever consign her to a life of hopeless misery, was to be preceded by a grand festival, and every note of preparation was sounded.

A thousand lights were streaming from incense burners, and the long colonnade of sphynxes and lions was lit up by their glare. The proud palace with its lofty arches, rung with joyous voices, while strains of enchanting music filled the air. But while every heart beat in unison to the general joy, those of Abram and Sarai were filled with sadness.

The fearful crisis at last came, and Sarai, gorgeously dressed, as a victim for the slaughter, was about to be led away by the voluptuous Pharaoh.

But hark! Among the assembled wine-excited throng a princess falls and a low sullen moan escapes her lips. Then another and another is smitten, and where before there was naught but joyous shouts of mirth, now the palace is filled with lamentation, mourning and woe. The angel of death is there, and one after another of the royal household is struck down and borne away to the place of graves.

What means this sudden and awful visitation? What has sent an avenging hand to strike terror into the heart of the king? He seeks to solve the awful mystery which has snatched his chosen ones from his side. In the midst of his terror the truth flashed upon his mind. "Can this be the wife of the Chaldean?"

Abram was instantly summoned to his presence. "What is this that thou hast done unto me?" said the terror-smitten king. "Why didst thou not tell me she was thy wife? Why saidst thou, she is my sister?" At this searching and pointed reproof from royal lips, Abram felt keenly the enormity of his deception. Shame and self-mortification, for the first time in his life, became the inmates of his troubled mind, and he was dumb with silence.

"Hast thou nothing to say? Wherefore didst thou deceive me," he added, "seeing that so much evil would come to my house on account thereof. Now therefore, behold thy wife, she is as she came from thy hand, take her and go thy way."

The agony of mind through which Sarai had passed was now relieved, the mountain pressure was taken from her heart, and falling into the arms of her beloved Abram she was clasped to his throbbing heart, again *his own*.

The pestilence was stayed in the court of Pharaoh, and just as the light of the succeeding morning was breaking over the hills, and bathing with its golden beams the city of Thebes, or ancient No Ammon, a cavalcade was seen moving along the shores of the Nile toward the land of Canaan.

It was a mild summer morn. The air was redolent with the perfume of many-tinted flowers, and vocal with the songs of bright-plumed birds, which filled the groves of oranges and lemons that lined the banks. Abram and his family, loaded with presents, were leaving Egypt. God had sent upon the land of Palestine fertilizing showers, and the parched earth was again renewed, the hills and plains and valleys were again covered with verdure, and smiling plenty bloomed on every hand. All nature wore an aspect of life and beauty, while songs of joy and gladness from those who had survived the famine, were heard in every place.

Day after day the cavalcade moves on towards the promised land, until finally the travelers enter its borders and soon reach Bethel, endeared by many hallowed associations. Abram and Sarai hasten to the altar erected previous to their depar-

ture, and there, surrounded by their numerous attendants and relatives, they bow and offer up a sacrifice of gratitude to the God of all their mercies, and renew their covenant with Heaven. Pleasant to them was the memory of past mercies, and sacred, above all other spots, was the one which had been consecrated by prayer and thanksgiving. Bethel never looked lovelier. It seemed as if to the past drouth had succeeded a new creation. Blooming flowers and clustering fruits were seen on every hand, and every heart was filled with joy at the return of plenty. To Abram and Sarai the simplicity, beauty, and purity of home were far more precious than the luxury and profligacy of the proud palace and court of Pharaoh, and many and grateful were the thanks they offered to God for their deliverance.

Bethel, however, with all its hallowed and delightful associations, was not sufficiently capacious for the numerous and rapidly increasing family and possessions of Abram and Lot. They were exceedingly rich in flocks and herds, sheep and oxen, camels and asses, men servants and maid servants, besides a large amount of silver and gold, and costly presents which they had received in Egypt. Though they lived together in peace and unity, yet the possessions of Abram and Lot were not in common, but kept separate and distinct from each other. So far as they were concerned they could

have lived forever in harmony, because, though their possessions were separate, their interests were one ; yet it was not so with their herdmen, among whom a strife arose in regard to the occupancy of pasturage. Notwithstanding all the efforts at reconciliation, it became evident that Abram and Lot must separate, and occupy different territories. This was peacefully agreed upon, and Abram, with a magnanimity which ever characterized his life, made the following proposal to Lot : "Let there be, I pray thee, no strife between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen, for we are brethren. Is not the whole land before thee ? Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me. If thou wilt take the left hand I will go to the right ; or, if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left."

Such generosity, on the part of Abram, to one who had under his protection and auspices, received all his standing in society and acquired all his possessions, was worthy of the man, and showed him possessed of a spirit vastly different from that which governs the generality of the best of men under like circumstances.

No sooner was the proposition made, than Lot, with a different spirit from that which dictated the generous proposal, eagerly made his selection of the fertile and well watered valley of the Jordan. This portion of the country was fruitful beyond

description, and for beauty was compared by the Almighty himself to the garden of the Lord. Every preparation necessary for the separation and journey being made, Lot, with his men servants and maid servants started for Sodom, one of the chief cities on the banks of the Jordan.

Abram, grieved at the necessity which caused his kinsman to separate from him, greatly feared the consequences of his taking up his abode in a land of strangers, and especially in a city where the inhabitants were wholly given to idolatry. Lot had departed, but not without his blessing, and at the morning and evening sacrifice a fervent remembrance was had of him and his family in his prayers. Shortly after Lot's departure the Lord appeared to Abram on the mountain, and said, "Lift up thine eyes and look from the place where thou art, northward and southward, and eastward and westward. For all the land which thou seest I will give to thee and thy seed forever. Arise, walk through the land in the length of it, and the breadth of it, for I will give it unto thee." This was but a renewal of the covenant, and while it assured Abram that his conduct in Egypt had not vitiated the sacred agreement, it also determined him in regard to his present location, and leaving Bethel's plains of peace and plenty, he removed, with all his possessions, again to the mountain range of Mamre.

We have already spoken of the ruggedness of

this district of country, and the reader has seen its previous inability to support the numerous family, and whether Abram was prompted to return to Mamre on account of the decrease in his family and flocks and herds by the separation of Lot and his possessions, or whether it was because he wished to extend his range, holding on still to the fertile valleys as his God-given possession, or whether he was specially directed of the Lord to this course of action, we are not informed. There were, to the mind of Abram, doubtless, reasons sufficient to justify him in the movement, and subsequent events in his history seems to indicate their correctness.

CHAPTER V.

BATTLE OF THE KINGS.

RUMORS of war, with its dire alarms, reached the Patriarch ere he had dwelt long in his beautiful mountain home. The confederate kings of the five cities of the plain, namely, Berah, the king of Sodom, Birsha, the king of Gomorrah, Shinab, the king of Admah, Shemeber, the king of Zeboim, and the king of Zoar, were under the government of Chederlaomer, the proud and mighty monarch of Persia. Being uneasy under the Persian yoke, which had pressed with galling weight upon them for twelve years, and unwilling to be any longer tributary, or submit to the heavy exactions imposed upon them to support that gorgeous Eastern monarchy, which extended its grasping arms over the most fertile portions of Palestine, they resolved to rally their forces and throw off the yoke. The note of preparation was sounded, soldiers were marshaled, and in anticipation of an invasion from the Persian army, every city was fortified. So thorough and perfect were the preparations for defense, that the Persian power alone was not able to overcome the kings of the plain, and again reduce them to subjection. Such was the opinion of

Chederlaomer himself, but he had powerful allies in the persons of Amraphel, the king of Chaldea, Arioc, the king of Babylon, and Tidal, the king of the surrounding nations, and through means of messengers sent to the courts of these respective kings, a league was formed, and every preparation was made for making war upon the five cities, and visiting their respective kings with summary vengeance.

Though the neighboring provinces of Palestine had not formally declared themselves independent, or entirely united with the five kings in throwing off their allegiance to the Persian government, still they manifested great disaffection, and bore with great uneasiness and constant murmurings their subjection to the throne of Persia. The king of Persia was aware of this state of things, and for the purpose of chastising them and thus coercing a more perfect obedience, as well as inflicting punishment, if not a war of extermination upon the rebellious kings of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboim, and Zoar, the allied powers marched their armies against the Rephaims in Astaroth-Karnahim, the Zuzims in Ham, the Emims in Shareh-Kiria-thaim, the Horites in Mount Seir, the Amalekites in Kadesh, and the Amorites in Hazezontamar. Thousands upon thousands of these defenseless Canaanites fell before the victorious arms of the allied powers, and wherever the proud hosts of Persia and

Assyria went, they carried desolation and rapine, and death. It appeared that the more that were slain by the insatiate sword, only whetted it for keener rapine and a more sanguinary destruction.

Tidings of this dreadful war reached the ears of the confederate kings of the vale of Siddim, and instead of remaining in their strongholds and waiting the attack of the enemy, as they should have done, so soon as they learned of their arrival on the confines of their territory, they marshaled their hosts and went out to give them battle. Though it was five kings against four yet the army of the five bore no comparison with the numerous hosts of the four mighty kings. Besides, the allied forces were flushed with successive victories, and they could not believe that the petty sovereignties of the plain would be able to measure swords with them upon the field of strife. The contending armies at length met, and a fierce and deadly conflict ensued. For hours nought was to be heard but the clash of arms and the groans of the wounded, mingled with the long and deafening shouts of the victors. Chariots and horsemen and footmen were all mingled together in wild confusion in the deadly strife. At length the army of the eastern allies prevails, and the kings of the plain retreat to their cities. In their retreat, the king of Sodom, and the king of Gomorrah, falling in slime pits, with which the plain of Siddim abounded in those days, are taken by the

pursuing hosts. The most of the army fled to the mountains, and the victorious hosts entering the cities take possession of the spoils, making all the inhabitants prisoners. After feasting and rioting upon the spoils, the cities were stripped of much of their treasure, and taking several of the most distinguished citizens prisoners, the army took its departure.

Eight years had now passed away since the separation of Abram and Lot, and as the distance from Mamre to Sodom was forty miles, it was seldom that Abram heard of the fate and fortunes of his kinsman. We have already alluded to the rumors of war which came to his ears, and his anxiety for the welfare of Lot was not a little heightened when a messenger, in breathless haste, approached his tent and exclaimed.

“Alas, master, Sodom is taken by the enemy, and thy kinsman Lot, with his wife and daughters, are carried away into captivity,”

“Whence comes the intelligence of my kinsman’s sad fate?”

“The kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fell and were taken in battle, and I, alone, of the number who fled to the mountains, have come to tell of my master’s fate.”

“What direction took the victorious army with its spoils?”

“The direction northward, this side the Jordan, my lord.”

“Then, by the help of the great Jehovah, I will rescue him,” said Abram, at the same time summoning trusty and chosen men, whom he sent as messengers to the confederate kings of the neighboring provinces, Aner, Eschol, and Mamre. In the mean time Abram armed his own chosen band of servants, to the number of three hundred and eighteen. Up to this time he had been a man of peace, following a pastoral life, and watching with pious fidelity over his flocks and herds, knowing nothing of the tumult and strife of war. Now his bosom heaved with a new and mighty impulse, not to gain the renown of a conqueror or to gratify a selfish and heartless ambition, but to avenge the wrongs done to his kinsman, and his magnanimous soul was kindled with energy to deliver him if possible from the hands of the enemy. His beloved Sarai shared in the truly patriotic feelings which moved his heart, and with her own fair hands she anointed his shield, balanced the nodding helmet upon his head, braced the corslet and mailed coat and buckler above the shining armor, and presented him the bright unsheathed sword which was not to return to its scabbard until injured innocence had been redressed, and the proud conquerors of Sodom and its confederate cities had been humbled in the dust at his feet.

It was not long until the approaching armies of his friendly allies sounded their trumpets on the

mountain ranges of Mamre. Soon, every arrangement being made, the venerable patriarch and his allies were seen on the line of march towards the field of contest. On their route they passed the northern limits of the plain of Jordan, and taking the direction of the lake of Gennessaret, they passed along its shores; crossing the tributary streams of Jordan they followed the course of that river up to its very head waters. The victorious army of the enemy was still before them, and they hurried their marches, only encamping at night for refreshment and rest. The spirit which actuated Abram seemed to have been communicated to all the confederate forces. His trust was in his God, and he was nerved by superhuman courage to advance upon the foe.

Already had the army marched a distance of one hundred and fifty miles, and were nearing the borders of Syria. Believing that the enemy could not be far off, spies were sent in advance to reconnoiter the ground and ascertain their position. It was not long until the messengers returned with the tidings that the army of Chederlaomer and his allies was encamped in one of the defiles of Mount Lebanon, reveling in the spoils of their successive victories, and wholly unconscious of any danger.

Abram called a council of war, and skilfully arranging all the forces as commander-in-chief, it was agreed that they should approach as near as possible the covert of the enemy, and wait until the first watch of the night before making an attack.

Night came, and with it the hour for action. Under cover of the darkness, the army, divided into four companies, led on by their respective commanders, stealthily advanced upon the encampment at different points. There were no sentinels posted by the enemy to guard the passes, and when they met on the summits and at the openings of the defile, they flanked out right and left. Then rose the battle-cry, which reverberated from rank to rank, "the sword of Jehovah and Abram," and with every sword drawn, and shields and lances glittering in the light of the moon, the patriot army rushed to the onset. So sudden was the shock of war, and so unprepared were the midnight revelers for defense, that they fell in great numbers, and the only concern that seemed to actuate the entire army was how to make their escape. Never was stratagem more successful, never was victory more complete. Terror-stricken they fly in confusion, and those who succeeded in making their escape fled into the deserts of Syria. Multitudes were taken as prisoners of war, and all the wealth of the spoils of the conquering army, of which they had drained Palestine, became the property of Abram and his confederates.

Lot and his family were saved, together with many of the nobility and citizens of the five cities of the plain. The army having met with such signal success in achieving its object, organized a

detachment of chosen men, and made preparations on the following morning to pursue the defeated kings. The route taken by the main body of the army that could be collected after the battle, was known to Abram, for he had sent spies after them. Immediate pursuit was given, and having but the advantage of a few hours, it was overtaken at Hobah not far from Damascus. A hot and desperate conflict ensued in which the kings were again vanquished, and fled, leaving the remainder of the spoil a prey to the victorious cohort of Abram.

Abram was now distant from Gomorrah one hundred and sixty miles, and from Mamre by that route, two hundred. So completely dispersed and broken were the forces of the enemy, and so little was the probability that they would be able to rally again, or attempt to reconquer the territories through which they had passed, that Abram thought proper to return to the main army, and collecting all the captives and spoils, to make preparations to return to the cities of the plain. He was encouraged in this by the signal interposition of Divine Providence in his behalf, and on joining the army which he had left on the sides of Lebanon, his suggestions met with an unanimous approval from his companions in arms. In a short time the victorious army was on its march home.

On their way back the nearest and most practicable route was to leave Gennessaret and the Jordan

to the left and pass through the hill country. It was not necessary, now that the great object of the expedition was accomplished, that the army should resort to forced marches, and hence they took their leisure, seeking the most suitable places for encampment. After such a fatiguing march, and arduous but successful battle, the officers and soldiers needed refreshment and rest. On these occasions Abram would take Lot and his family into his tent, and hours were spent in hearing them rehearse their history since the separation, and the adventurous incidents connected with the fatal battle at Sodom and their captivity under Chederlaomer and his allies. The recital of many things connected with life in Sodom, and the trials and hardships endured by the family while in captivity, was painful to Abram, and he labored to effect a re-union of the families, promising them full protection and every blessing they desired, in his mountain home at Mamre. But, alas, Lot's heart was too strongly wedded to Sodom and its pleasure-seeking, profligate inhabitants, to induce him to entertain with proper regard the kind proposal. His wife and daughters, too, had formed associations which they could not think of exchanging for a country home.

At length the army approached the ancient city of Salem near to the mount which was called Moriah. It was a lovely spot. A peaceful vale formed by the aforementioned mountain and another

on the east, which was crowned with olive trees, spread out its inviting bowers to the toil-worn army, and here they pitched their tents and encamped for the night, among the clustering vines and overshadowing olives of the valley. A silvery stream wound through the valley, reflecting the hues of the beautiful flowers which grew upon its margin and casting their fragrance on the evening air. The whole valley, and the sides of the mountains, to their very summits, were clothed with flowers of the most enchanting hues, and trees of the utmost grace and beauty. It reminded Abram of Eden, in his own land, where he had such a glorious vision at the ceremony of the worship of the god of day.

Early on the following morning, while the sun was gilding the tops of Olivet and reflecting its mellow glory on the valley below, as Abram was engaged at his devotions in his tent, he was startled at witnessing a form descend into the vale, dressed in the most gorgeous apparel, with a priestly miter on his head. For sumptuousness of vestments he had never witnessed any thing, even in the magnificent palace of the king of Nineveh, or the temple of the priests in Babylon, that excelled those worn by the mysterious stranger. He approached Abram with dignity and grace. An unearthly radiance shone from his countenance, and a smile of inimitable sweetness played over his calm benignant features. In one hand the stranger held a roll of

bread, and in the other a cup of wine. "Surely," thought Abram, "this is a celestial visitant, the angel of Jehovah himself." Approaching the tent, Abram advanced to meet him with a firm and confident step. Then "the priest of the most high God" presented to Abram the bread and the wine, while the mysterious person pronounced the following benediction:

"Blessed be Abram of the most high God who is possessor of heaven and earth, and blessed is the most high God, who hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand."

Then was it known to Abram who the stranger was, for though by name Melchizedeck, which in the Hebrew tongue meaneth king of Salem, or prince of Peace, yet had he a name which is above every name, a priest and king forever, without beginning of days or end of years. He had communed with God, and the light and glory of that hour constituted one of the happiest reminiscences of his eventful but faithful life. A divine revelation unto him, after this manner, had never been made to Abram before. The wonderful person before him was the prophet, priest, and king, infallible, perfect and everlasting, and, a greater than Abram and all the kings of the earth, and to him the patriarch presented a tenth part of all the spoils of the enemy as a grateful offering to God for his interposition in his behalf.

Pleasant and delightful as it would have been for the returning army to have tarried longer in this peaceful vale, it was necessary that they should resume their march on the following morning. We shall not detain the reader by a recital of all the events connected with the march from Salem to Sodom. Suffice it to say, that in a short space of time, passing along the valley of the Jordan they entered the rich and fertile vale of Siddim. The king of Sodom, on hearing of their arrival in the country hastened out to meet the approaching army. The released captives shouted aloud for joy when the sight of their native city burst upon their view. Many of them, doubtless, thought when they were taken captive that they were leaving their home and their kindred forever, but Providence had ordered otherwise, and by the powerful arm of a chieftain unknown in the annals of war, they were rescued and restored to their homes and friends. The king of Sodom received Abram and his confederates with every demonstration of respect. The spoils of the cities, consisting, in part, as we have already seen, of great treasures, were brought back with the captives, and preparations were made by the generous patriarch to restore them to the respective cities to which they belonged. To this end a council of the kings was called and the treasures presented, that each might claim the portion belonging to their respective provinces. In addition to the treasure

were large quantities of cattle which had been taken from the inhabitants and the surrounding nations through which Chederlaomer had passed with his army.

The magnanimous proposal of Abram to return the spoils of war, which of right belonged to him and his confederates, was met by the generous refusal of the kings to receive any portion of it, all they asked was the restoration of the captives of war. To this Abram replied, "I have sworn to the God of heaven, that I will not take from a thread even to a shoe-latchet, and that I will not take any thing that belongs to others, lest it should be said, 'Abram hath gained his riches by force and arms. All that I ask is that which the soldiers have eaten, and the portion that is justly due my confederates, Aner, Eschol and Mamre.'" The captives from the neighboring states of Palestine were sent, every man, to their homes, with the portion of the spoil which had been taken from each.

Great were the rejoicings in the cities of the plain. All the kings and nobles did obeisance to Abram, and such was the respect and esteem in which he was held that they would have made him monarch of the land of Palestine, but he refused the scepter at their hands. God having already given to him the entire country, he chose not to accept any distinction or inheritance from mortals, preferring to stand in his lot and obey alone the directions of

that divine voice which called him from his grotto in Ur of the Chaldees, and from the temple and palaces of Babylon to this then unknown land, a stranger and a pilgrim. For him there were to be higher, holier manifestations, connected with the destiny of nations yet unborn, and his faith in the divine promise assured him, that through his seed, though yet childless, all the nations of the earth were to be blessed to the end of time.

The army was disbanded, and the confederates of Abram returned with their portions of the spoils to their respective provinces.

At length the day arrived for Abram's return to his home in Mamre. He had not heard from his beloved Sarai and household since entering upon his successful expedition, and he was anxious again to embrace the wife of his youth and the idol of his heart. Collecting together his servants, now no longer herdsmen, but well trained soldiers, they entered upon their march. Vast multitudes, including the kings and nobility, escorted them from Sodom, and as the triumphal procession moved through the streets, and passed over the plain to ascend the mountain, loud shouts of victory rent the air, while from every tongue was heard the exclamation, "Long live Abram, the servant of the most high God possessor of heaven and earth, who hath delivered our enemies into his hand; and long live Aner and Eschol and Mamre, his faithful friends and allies."

Many had been the fears, and dark the forebodings of the devoted Sarai, and many and earnest had been her prayers for the successful return of Abram. Nor did she hear of anything connected with his fate or that of his army, until, on a clear bright morning, after rising from her devotions, her heart was made to leap for joy, as from her tent she beheld floating in the distance the victorious banners of the returning army. Calling her maids, she hastened out, with timbrels and song, to meet her beloved spouse and his brave soldiers. It was a joyous meeting. Abram sprang forward and clasped in a long and rapturous embrace the beloved Sarai, and all partook of the general joy. Mamre, with its tents, never looked more beautiful, nor did ever the mountain plain ring with louder notes of gladness than on that auspicious day.

CHAPTER VI.

VISIT OF THE ANGELS TO SODOM.

ON one of those calm, quiet evenings peculiar to the rural districts of Palestine, as Abram was sitting in a grove engaged in meditation, and pleasant reminiscences came thronging upon his mind, in which he experienced the most grateful emotions, arising from a consideration of the Divine interposition on his behalf, especially in his late victorious expedition, a shade of doubt, if not of sadness, was seen to pass over his placid features. The thought which rippled the otherwise calm surface of his features, and cast a shadow over its brightness, was, that having been the commander-in-chief of the confederate forces which achieved a victory over the mighty army of the eastern allies, they would ere long rally their forces and seek revenge. Under such circumstances he could not but feel troubled. At this juncture the Almighty appeared to him and allayed his apprehensions by assuring him that he had undertaken his defense and would ever reward his faithfulness. The words which came to his ears and carried confidence to his heart were, "Fear not Abram, I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward."

In connection with this, another thought of a distrustful character, took possession of his mind; so true it is that kindred thoughts, be they pleasant or painful, generally associate themselves together, and pass in succession before the mind. He had waited long for the fulfilment of the promise made to him in Chaldea, before he left his native city and which had been renewed to him since his arrival in Palestine. He had been for many years a wanderer, and both he and his beloved Sarai had their faith tried in the long delay of the promise. God had ever proven faithful to him, and he had every reason to believe that the day of joyous fulfilment would come, but "hope deferred maketh the heart sick," and hope and fear darkly struggled for the mastery. Having had his mind put at rest in regard to protection from his foes, he desired additional information as an encouragement to his hopes in regard to the promise, and he ventured to address the Lord, "What wilt thou give me, O Lord," said he, "seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus. Behold thou hast given me no seed, and lo, one born in my house is my heir."

Heretofore he relied on the naked promise of Jehovah; now it seems he wished to have an additional confirmation by a sensible sign. God condescended to confirm the promise as the patriarch desired, and commanded him to make preparations for a sacrifice.

Twilight was advancing, the last rays of the setting sun had already faded away in the west, and the giant trees of Mamre were casting their shadows on the ground. First the evening star, and then the others in its train, began, one after another, to take their stations in the sky. Soon the whole heavens were lighted up with the starry host, and the broad galaxy overhead, formed of innumerable suns and systems, seemed like the avenue of angels, through which they entered the portals of heaven. While Abram stood beside the sacrifice which he had prepared, and, as he was wont, gazed on the bright orbs above, a light superior to their brightness gently descended from the parted heavens and rested above him. It was the same divine glory which had before shed its light upon his vision.

“Cast thine eyes now towards heaven,” said the Divine voice, “and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them. Thus shall thy children be, O Abram!” The soul of the patriarch was filled with bewildering delight as he gazed upon the glory above and around him. Deeper and more intense became that glory. It settled upon him and filled his senses with a rapture insupportable to a mortal nature. Abram was entranced. The material world was shut out from his vision, the stars themselves faded away in the ineffable light, and he was lost to all but the spiritual world around him and within him. Before his spiritual vision now spread out the

future of four hundred years, embracing the history of his family and their various fortunes, from their bondage in Egypt to their final settlement in Palestine. All the events connected with their wonderful history, during the hundreds of years to come, were spread out as in a vast panorama before his astonished vision.

After this had passed, another scene presented itself to the entranced patriarch. Between the parted victims, slain for sacrifice, there appeared a smoking furnace and a burning lamp. These were the symbols of the Divine presence, and by Abram their nature and significance were fully understood. The divine promise was now confirmed as it never had been before, and with it was a confirmation of Abram's faith, such as ever afterwards kept him from doubt, and prompted him under the most discouraging circumstances to hope on in full assurance of a fulfilment of the promise, in God's own time.

When the revelation had ended and the divine glory had disappeared, the patriarch was awakened from his mysterious trance as one would awake from a quiet slumber. The light and glory had departed, the smoking furnace and the lamp were gone. All was still. The moon had risen and walked in brightness among the stars. All nature seemed to be enjoying a calm repose after being the silent witness of a scene such as it had never beheld before. Abram turns away slowly from the spot, and walks

towards his habitation. Away in the deep shade of the woods he beholds an object approaching. It was a slender, graceful form, not unlike his beloved Sarai, and yet it is not the idol of his heart, for he knew too well her step to be deceived in this. A nearer approach shows it to be the dark-eyed Egyptian maid, Hagar, whom Pharaoh had presented to Sarai as her attendant at the harem. As she came near she exclaimed, "Is this my Lord? My mistress is anxious for thy return, and from the lateness of the hour hath sent me forth to find thee." It was not long until he embraced the anxious one, and breathed into her listening ear the burning thoughts of his heart, re-assuring her that she should yet fold in her maternal arms the hope of the world.

Notwithstanding all these assurances, as well as what she had herself experienced of the divine regard in working out deliverances in her behalf as well as that of her husband, her mind was filled with perplexing doubts and fears in regard to the fulfilment of God's word, that she should bear the child of promise. Years pass away and increase those distracting fears, until at length wearied and faint with long expectation, she conceives—as the ever fruitful and inventive mind of woman is wont to do—a strange device, and one which, though not positively unlawful in the times in which she lived, was still highly questionable, if not dishonorable to her faith, as distrusting the promise and the oath of God con-

firmed by the most wonderful signs. The strange and wonderful device which she conceived, was this, namely, to give her favorite handmaid, Hagar, to Abram for a wife in a second and subordinate capacity. She was now well stricken in years, and her faith could scarcely prompt her to believe that she would ever have a child. She would therefore obviate this difficulty, by giving up Hagar to her husband, that the child which should be the result of this temporary union, might be adopted by her and made the child of promise. Such were the thoughts and reasonings of Sarai, but little did she dream that she was mingling for herself ingredients in a cup of sorrow which she would have one day to drain to its very dregs. Her Egyptian maid should have ever stood before her as a monument and memorial of that unhappy journey to the court of Pharaoh, so deeply fraught with peril to her virtue, but through which Providence had enabled her to pass unhurt. Censurable as she was for her conduct in attempting to forestal the designs of Divine Providence, still she must not be judged too harshly in the light of modern civilization. Polygamy was allowed in that dark age of the world, and for many succeeding ages. She had long and earnestly desired to see her devoted husband realize the great wish of his heart, and none but God knows the struggles of her heart, and the deep, intense and bitter conflicts which she endured before she made

up her mind to relinquish the idol of her heart to another, and the right of becoming the progenitor of that great and honored line which for many years she fondly hoped would have hailed her as their mother. While therefore, the sacrifice which she made evinced great magnanimity of soul, and an earnest desire to see the plans of Jehovah consummated, still it was suggested by unbelief in the divine promise, and fraught with peril. No sooner was Hagar raised from the condition of a servant to something like an equality with her mistress than she began to cherish the hope that she was to be the favored mother of Abram's posterity; for she was not ignorant of that which interested her master and mistress, and was so often the topic of conversation in the patriarchal family. The consequence of such imaginings became soon apparent in her conduct towards her mistress. Instead of regarding with more respect and affection the woman who had manifested so much magnanimity, and made so great a sacrifice of feeling in her behalf, she affected to look upon her with contempt, and began to assume a supercilious tone in her manners which roused the lofty spirit of Sarai. Though she had by her own mistaken policy brought all these evils upon herself, still there was a point of endurance beyond which she could not go, and she consequently made known her complaints to Abram. The result was that Hagar was excluded from the family and sent

out an exile into the wilderness of Mamre. Though an outcast, and abandoned by the patriarchal family, still she was not forsaken of God. Sadly and sorrowfully she wandered about in the desert, not knowing where to go. She had grievously offended her mistress, and to return to her seemed impossible; indeed she felt that rather than do so she would perish in solitude. Weary and fatigued with walking she sat down by one of those fountains of water which break out of the cliffs on the sides of the desert mountain. Scarcely had she seated herself ere she was startled by a soft and kindly voice which pronounced her name. She turned and beheld an angel who continued addressing her, "Whence camest thou, and whither art thou going."

"I flee from the face of my mistress, Sarai."

"Return to thy mistress and submit thyself to her hands, for I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, so that it shall not be counted for multitude. Thou shalt bear a child and shalt call his name Ishmael, because the Lord hath heard thy affliction."

For a moment she stood bewildered, for she knew it was the Divine One who spake to her. The tears came flashing up to her dark eyes like the streams from the fountain whose waters were playing at her feet. Obeying the divine directions she turned her steps homeward, and on arriving there, with meekness and docility she entered the tent of her mistress.

In process of time the child was born, and Abram gave it the name designated by the Lord. Still he was not the child of promise, though assured that he should be the progenitor of a vast multitude. So far from being the child of promise in whom all the families of the earth were to be blessed, it was said of him that "his hand should be against every man, and every man's hand should be against him." Thirteen long years roll sluggishly away, and during all this time no visions of God throw their light and glory upon the path of the weary pilgrims. No divine messenger repeated the assurance of the long cherished promise, and the sun of Abram and Sarai seemed fast sinking behind a dark and clouded sky. History is silent about the melancholy years passed by the patriarch and his wife. Their faith was put to the severest test. Abram was now nearing his hundredth year and Sarai her ninetieth. But as the darkest hour is just before the breaking day, and as man's extremity is God's opportunity, so in the deepest night of their despondency Jehovah again appeared. The two were sitting together in their spacious pavilion, given up to sad and melancholy thoughts. Presently a light shone around them, enclosing them as in a circle, and the well known voice of Jehovah said, "Walk before me, and be thou perfect, and I will make my covenant between thee and me, and I will multiply thee exceedingly." At this Abram fell on his face, and Jehovah still

conversed with him, saying, "As for me, behold my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be the father of many nations, neither shall thy names be Abram and Sarai, but *Abraham* and *Sarah*, for a father and mother of many nations have I made thee. I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and nations and kings shall come out of thy loins. I will make a covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee in their generation, for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee and thy seed forever. And I will give unto thee and thy seed, all the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession. This is the covenant which I shall make, and which thou and thy seed shalt keep forever. Every man child that is among you shall be circumcised, and it shall be a token of a covenant between me and you. As for Sarah, I will bless her and she shall have a son, and thou shalt call his name Isaac, and she shall be the mother of many nations. I will also establish my covenant with Isaac at this time next year." After this Jehovah ceased talking with Abraham, the glory departed from the tent, and the patriarch arose and taking Ishmael, and all that were born in his house, he performed upon them and upon himself the rite of circumcision, as the Lord had commanded.

It is the hour of noon, and under the burning rays of an Asiatic sun, every thing droops and languishes in Mamre. The breeze floats so softly over

the mountain as scarcely to stir the leaves of the most fragile flower. The flocks are gathered beneath the shade of overhanging rocks on the mountain side, or have descended into the vale beside the still waters. The traveler forsakes the dusty highway and seeks the shelter of the towering oak, or finds repose in some neighboring dell or shady grove. The old homestead of the patriarch, of which we have already spoken, was on the southern portion of the mountain range, about midway between the vale of Siddim and the Mediterranean, and from its elevation the spectator had a view of the whole of the surrounding country for many miles. While the venerable patriarch was sitting in his tent door, enjoying the refreshing shade cast by one of the spacious trees by which it was embowered, he was startled by the sudden appearance of three mysterious strangers who had taken their station at the foot of the tree. With true patriarchal hospitality he immediately rose from his seat, and hastening to the strangers invited them to enter his tent for purposes of rest and refreshment. At this a most interesting colloquy ensued between Abraham and one of them, whom he soon recognized to be the Lord, the same divine personage that had appeared to him before, and had spoken words of comfort and blessing.

After the three mysterious personages had partaken of the hospitalities of his house and had

re-assured him of the fulfilment of the Divine covenant in regard to himself and posterity, they made preparations for their journey.

But the hospitality of the patriarch did not end here. The sacred record informs us he took the three angels on their journey. Their destination was the cities of the plain. After traveling some distance, one of the three (the Lord), informed Abraham of the object of their visit, which was the destruction of these cities on account of their flagrant crimes. The heart of Abraham was touched at their impending doom; besides, Lot, his kinsman, was an inhabitant of one of these devoted cities, and must inevitably, with his family, share a common fate with their population. He therefore intercedes in their behalf. Knowing that the divine justice did not require the punishment of the innocent with the guilty, as illustrated by the deliverance of Noah and his family when the world was destroyed by water, he suggests that sparing mercy be exercised on the condition that a certain number of righteous men be found. But, alas, there were not five among all the guilty thousands, that feared God and wrought righteousness. Expostulation could go no further; he resigned the doomed cities to their fate and turned his face towards home.

Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboim, as we have seen, were regal cities. They were not built at a very early period, as we find no traces of them

in profane history. In the same chapter of Genesis in which an account of the building of Nineveh, Rehoboth, Calah, and Resin, occurs, we find a mention of Sodom and Gomorrah as already existing cities.

They occupied a spacious valley or plain, hemmed in by towering mountains. Through the center of this valley flowed the river Jordan. Divine inspiration in recording the beauty and fertility of the spot, compares it to the Garden of the Lord, or ancient Eden. This description leaves a wide margin for speculation. Notwithstanding the devastations of war, these cities were filled with an immense population. They were surrounded by extensive fields of waving grain, oliveyards, vineyards, and immense tracts of verdure enameled with flowers of every hue.

The sun was just sinking behind the western hills, and the lowing herd were returning to their peaceful folds, driven by their attendant shepherds, as the three strangers are seen descending the western declivity and directing their steps with rapid pace towards Sodom. Lot, as an elder in Sodom, sat at the gate to dispense justice, and the appearance of the three mysterious travelers arrests his attention. Their dress, their features, and whole demeanor, are singularly striking. Instead of sensuality and wickedness, which so strongly marked the bold wanton features of the Sodomites, he beheld angelic

purity, innocence, and sweetness. Knowing the unblushing wickedness of his neighbors, whose filthy conversation and deeds vexed his righteous soul from day to day, he feared lest the strangers would suffer abuse at their polluted hands. To offer them the protection and hospitalities of his house was but the work of a moment, and he invited them to enter his dwelling and take up their abode with him during their stay in the city. The angels seemed unwilling to comply with this request, and informed Lot that they would stay all night in the street. At this he earnestly pressed them to enter his house, and they finally yielded to his solicitations.

Supper was provided by the family, and the guests having partaken, were about retiring to rest, when a wild, rude shout, as if from an excited mob, was heard in front of the dwelling. A large company of guilty Sodomites, composed of the hoary headed and the young, clamorously demanded that the strangers be given to them. Lot went out of his house closing the door after him, and affectionately remonstrated with them, saying, "I pray you, brethren, do not so wickedly." All his kind remonstrance and entreaties were in vain. In vain did he plead the rites of hospitality due to strangers. One of the mob came up and in a gruff, angry voice, commanded Lot to "stand back." Just then another of the lewd rabble exclaimed, "This fellow came in to sojourn with us, and he must needs be a

judge; now we will deal worse with him than with the strangers." At this the crowd pressed in upon him, and came near forcing the door. Just at that moment one of the angels drew Lot into the house and closed the door, and at the same time smote the infuriated mob with blindness, so that old and young staggered round in darkness, not knowing where to go. Thus disarmed and disqualified for further attack, they made no subsequent attempts at forcing an entrance into the house. The angels then informed Lot of the object of their visit, and advised him to gather together all his kindred and make immediate preparation for leaving the city. He accordingly hastened to their residences.

It was now the dead hour of night, the rabble had dispersed and the streets were comparatively deserted, but here and there, in lordly palaces, lights were gleaming and the palaces shook with the heavy tread of the multitude in the whirl of the giddy dance. All was mirth and revelry. No sleep till morn would come upon the eyes of all those guilty throngs. Alas! that it should prove the long dread sleep of death. From street to street Lot hurried on. Finding his relatives, he uttered the warning, "Up! Get ye out of this city, for the Lord will destroy it." Instead of heeding the warning, they looked upon him as one bereft of his senses. With a sad heart he left them to their fate, and returned to his dwelling.

At length the night passed away, the last night to Sodom and its sister cities. The grey streaks of morning were tinging the eastern sky. A long, narrow line of light skirted the summit of the eastern mountain which bounded the plain of the Jordan. The watchmen were retiring from the walls of the city, and the revelers to their homes, surfeited with debauchery. The only period of stillness for the twenty-four hours had come to Sodom; but it was the stillness that precedes the storm. It was like the hushed stillness which nature inspires previous to the enactment of one of her awful dramas.

The angels arose, and taking Lot, his wife, and two daughters, the only inmates of the family, they hastened out of the city. On their route, not far from the base of the mountain to the south of Sodom, lay the city of Bela, or Zoar. The angels having conducted the family within sight of this city, said to Lot, "Escape, for thy life look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed." But Lot replied, "Not so, my Lord; behold now thy servant hath found grace in thy sight, and thou hast magnified thy mercy which thou hast showed unto me, in saving my life, and I cannot escape to the mountain lest some evil take me, and I die. This city is near to flee to, and it is a little one: O, let me escape thither, and my soul shall live." The angel consented, and said, "I will not overthrow this city for

which thou hast spoken, but haste thee, escape thither, for I cannot do anything until thou art there." At this Lot and his two daughters hastened on, but his wife lingered behind. Two of her daughters, with all of her pleasant things, were left behind, and she was loth to leave the idols of her heart.

The sun was just gilding the top of the mountain which rises above Zoar, as Lot entered its gate. It was a lovely morning in summer. All nature rejoiced in the light of day. The dew drops which heaven shed so gently on flower and tree during the night, sparkled like diamonds in the light of the morning sun. The birds sang sweetly as they flitted from bower to bower, and filled the groves with melody. All, but man, was innocent, and all, but man, united in ascriptions of praise to God.

Scarcely had the whole disc of the sun become visible to the dwellers on the plain ere from the west, as if from the very depths of the great sea, there arose a dark and angry cloud, whose fretted borders were seen emerging from the summits of the craggy mountain which overlooked the valley from the west. Onward the storm-cloud urged its way. Soon the whole heavens were shrouded in darkness, and blackness covered the cities of the plain. The wolf of the mountain ran howling from his lair. The eagle screaming with affright, swept away to her eyrie on high. The birds, bewildered,

flew about wildly, and ceased to sing. All nature joined in a wail of mourning, for the day of doom had come. That cloud was charged with wrath, and presently, as from a thousand batteries, there poured forth streams of liquid fire, which like burning lava from a volcano, fell upon the cities of the plain, and instantly they were enveloped in a general conflagration. The palaces and dwellings and walls, composed as they were of highly inflammable materials, were all consumed in the devouring fire; the very plain ignited like inflammable gas, and the whole valley was consumed, embracing the circuit of the cities. The whole area, to the affrighted spectator, looked like a vast cauldron of boiling pitch on fire, the roar of which made the surrounding mountains tremble. The wife of Lot, not heeding the admonition of the angel, but casting long and lingering looks towards the idols of her heart which she left in Sodom, was caught in the outskirts of the storm, and to this day a pillar of salt, detached from the side of the mountain, near the shore of the Dead Sea, is pointed out by the natives as the pillar of Lot's wife.

Abraham, "the friend of God," and the "father of the faithful," after leaving the angels, returned to his home on the highlands of Mamre. His mind was filled with many overpowering thoughts: the promise of one of the celestial strangers in regard to Sarah, and that in his promised son all the fami-

lies of the earth should be blessed, the descendants of whom were to be as numerous as the stars of heaven, for multitude—the fate of Sodom, and Lot, his kinsman, all constituted themes of absorbing interest, and produced in his mind the most intense excitement.

Passing a sleepless night, he hastened in the morning to the highest point of the mountain range, which formed the southern boundary of Mamre, and casting his eye in the direction of the valley of the Jordan, he saw immense columns of smoke rising up and covering the whole valley for many miles. It was an awfully sublime spectacle and filled the patriarch with awe. As he gazed upon the scene before him, the smoke, which was so dense, after attaining a certain altitude settled and appeared like a huge black monument which had risen up from the valley below, filling the entire space and forming an immense dome, the base of which was formed by the mountains that skirted the valley on either side. To Abraham this was a most melancholy sight, and he turned away to weep over the fate of Sodom.

CHAPTER VII.

PROMISE FULFILLED.

SOUTH of the high plains of Mamre, between Kadesh and Shur, was Gerar, one of the Metropolitan cities of Palestine. Soon after the destruction of Sodom and the neighboring cities, from some cause or other, concerning which history and tradition are both silent, Abraham collected together his numerous family and possessions, and removed to this city. Strange as it may seem, on his way thither, he conceived the same device wherewith to deceive the king of Gerar that he had adopted to deceive Pharaoh, in regard to his relation to Sarah. The longevity of the men and women was such, at that early day, that though Sarah was well stricken in years, she had not passed life's prime, and still retained her surpassing beauty. Indeed, if any thing, she was more beautiful than in her youthful days, age having imparted an expression and character to her oriental features which made her a model of womanly beauty.

When the family arrived at the city, Abimelech, the king, no sooner saw her than, like the king of Egypt, smitten with her beauty, he resolved on taking her to his embrace. Learning that she was

Abraham's sister, he ordered her to be taken to his palace for the purpose of making her his concubine. She was accordingly removed, and while the king was making preparation for the sacrifice of her virtue, the Almighty appeared to him in a dream and warned him from committing the iniquitous act by assuring him that if he took to his embrace a woman whose husband was a prophet, he should be punished with immediate death. In consequence of this interposition, the king immediately summoned Abraham to his presence, whom he severely reprimanded for his imposition in calling the woman his sister, when she was his wife. The prophet alleged that he did it for his own safety, being apprehensive that had it been known she was his real wife, he might in order to possess her, have robbed him of his existence. He also assured him that she was his sister, for though not born of his mother, she was begotten by his father. The explanation satisfied the king, and he restored Sarah and gave many valuable presents to Abraham with a full permission for him to settle in any part of the land. The Lord had not only threatened the king with death, should he violate the chastity of Sarah, but also afflicted him and all the women belonging to him with a kind of impotence. In return for Abimelech's generosity the Patriarch prayed that the curse of impotency might be removed from the king and all his women, and the result was that all were restored to their natural power and fertility.

Having selected a beautiful region where he pitched his tents and planted his grove, and where he enjoyed all the added affluence of the king of Gerar, the long looked for and earnestly desired period arrived when the promise was to be fulfilled. The birth of a child is always an event which awakens the deep fountains of a mother's love, but what pen can describe the sensations which thrill her soul when she looks upon her *first* born? A cord is then struck which had been untouched before. Whether in moments of playfulness when the springs of young life are gushing with a wild exuberant joy, or in the more sanguine days of riper youth when life opens its gorgeous scenes to view, never before has she experienced such deep and overwhelming sensations of rapture. Before, she had loved with an affection sweet as life itself and had felt all the bliss of being loved, but now her emotions are of a new nature, at least of a higher nature; her eye fills with tears while she gazes, and the blood dances with soft yet rapturous delight through her veins. In its strength and power that love may be felt again, but in its strange, mysterious novelty, never. What then must have been the feelings of Sarah, as, for the first time, she gazes upon the beloved gift of God! They were indeed the feelings of a mother, but there were most glorious associations connected with the birth of her child. It was the realization of a long deferred hope, the fulfilment of

a promise that was to embrace in its wide sweep the destiny of the world. As she pressed the lovely babe, for the first time, to her throbbing bosom, all the old and hallowed memories of the past, and all the long cherished hopes of the future came crowding with their gushing glories upon her bewildered imagination, filling her with unutterable emotions.

All was joy and gladness in the tents of Abraham. A joyous festal day had come, and every heart was glad. It was the period when the beloved Isaac should be weaned from his mother's breast and receive the seal of the covenant, of which he was the pledge. Abraham's chosen men and maid servants were present to participate at the spacious pavilion of the Patriarch in the festivities of the hour. The dark-eyed Egyptian maid, with her wonderful son, was there, and the ceremonies connected with the religious rite were about being performed, when, in the sneer and laugh of Ishmael, who seemed to have been pre-ordained to mar all scenes of happiness by an opposing hand, was witnessed a contempt for the child of promise. This aroused the grief and indignation of the mother, who said to her husband, "Cast out this bondwoman and her son, for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son." It was uttered in a strong, peremptory tone, as it was not the first time offense had come through Hagar. Abraham was sad on account of his son Ishmael. His birth had awakened the first parental

feelings, and to cast him off was a severe trial of his faith. But it was the will of God that this should be, and he made ready for the departure of the lad and his sorrow stricken mother. The scene that followed has been portrayed in vivid colors upon the canvass, and with deep pathos by the pen, as Hagar is represented in subdued sadness turning herself away to catch with tearful eye the tent she should behold no more—the trembling benediction of the patriarch father, as, with a gush of grief known only to a father, he presses his boy for the last time to his throbbing heart.

The bondwoman and her son started out on their weary pilgrimage, friendless exiles in the forest solitudes of Beer Sheba. They wandered on till night, not knowing whither they had strayed; and when fatigued and overcome with their weary journey, they laid down side by side on the dewy earth, beneath the quiet stars which looked forth like angel guardians upon the exiled sleepers. Day after day they journeyed on, penetrating farther and farther into the wilderness, and as the anxious mother saw the scanty provision fast wasting away, a dark prospect, a frightful image of starvation rose before her affrighted imagination. Still she shut it out and hoped in God. Onward and onward the mother and her boy pursue their journey, but alas, the bread was exhausted, the water was gone, beneath their feet were scorching sands, above, a burning sky.

They had entered the desert and had gone too far to return. Night came on and the child grew faint. He cried for bread, but he wanted more the water, for his swollen tongue and parched lips seemed to say, "I must drink or die." But yonder is a small clump of trees. "I must hasten to that," said Hagar, "ere my child die." Taking the precious burden in her arms she bends her steps towards the oasis. The head of the boy had scarcely fallen upon his mother's shoulder ere he was fast asleep. Wearied nature could hold out no longer. But his arms are cold, and he breathes heavily. "O, my God," said the despairing mother, as she staggered forward and laid him down under a shrub on the green bank, "let me not see the death of the child." Going a short distance she fell prostrate on the ground and burst out into the most passionate exclamations of grief.

Heaven witnessed that scene of earthly sorrow, and as the extremity of mortals is the opportunity of Jehovah, there came trembling on the still night air an angel voice, saying, "Arise, lift up the lad and hold him in thy hand, for I will make him a great nation." She obeyed the Divine voice, and springing to her feet quick as thought, she looked and saw a few feet from her a fountain of water reflecting the light of the stars from its pure, mirror-like surface. Returning with her bottle filled with the precious beverage, she raised her son, and with

tones of love, such as only a mother can use, she called him to consciousness and said "Drink my son, for God careth for thee." Thus revived, the glad mother lay down beside her boy, and refreshing sleep and pleasant visions imparted new life to mother and son, for God was with them. It was not long until they found subsistence, and in that very wilderness where Jehovah met Hagar and Ishmael, the son became a mighty warrior, and it is the possession of his descendants to this day. In process of time his mother procured for him a wife of her own kindred among the dark-eyed daughters of Egypt, and the exile from Beer Sheba became the wild man of prophecy, the father of a wandering people, as yet unconquered and unconquerable. But more of this anon.

Not long after the great festival which was held by the family of Abraham, and the events which we have recorded in regard to Hagar and Ishmael had taken place, the king of Gerar, and the captain of his host presented themselves at the door of the patriarch's tent. It appears that some strife had arisen between some of the subjects of the king and Abraham's servants in regard to a well of water, and that it had occasioned a strife in which the Philistines had proven too strong for Abraham's servants. The difficulties connected with this contest had just come to the ears of the patriarch, and he was not much at a loss in conjecturing the object of

this visit. The chief captain of the host had himself led on the contest, and fearing lest the wrath of Abraham would be roused, and being well aware of his power as a warrior, the fame of his achievements in rescuing the kings of Sodom from the combined forces of the East having reached his ears, he therefore comes to the patriarch accompanied by the king for the purpose of suing for conditions of peace.

Phicol, for that was the name of the captain of the host, addressing Abraham, said, in behalf of the king, "God is with thee in all that thou doest. Now, therefore, swear unto me, by the great Jehovah, that thou wilt not deal falsely with me, nor with my son, nor with my son's son, but according to the kindness that I have done unto thee thou shalt do unto me, and to the land wherein thou hast sojourned." Abraham then addressd Abimelech, and after reproving him on account of the violence used by his subjects in regard to the well, said, "O, king, be it according as thou wilt, I am ready to swear." Abimelech replied, "I know not who hath done this thing, neither had I heard of it until now." All things being in readiness for the covenant, Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech, and he also took seven ewe lambs and set them before him. The king, not understanding this last presentation, said to Abraham, "What meaneth this?" He replied, "They are a witness

unto me that I have digged this well.” “Be it so,” said the king, and they crossed their hands and swore in the presence and name of God, everlasting friendship for each other. After the ceremony was ended, Abraham called the place where the covenant was made, Beer Sheba, because there both of them had sworn—and such is its name to this day.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TRIAL OF FAITH.

ISAAC, the child of promise, and the pledge of universal blessing to man, was reared by his mother with tenderest solicitude in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. For several years nothing occurred to mar the peace of the faithful family, or break in upon their joys. All was light and sunshine in the tent of Abraham. The young and beloved Isaac had passed his childhood and reached the period of youth, full of promise, and the idol of his parent's joy. He was not only the hope of their declining years, but he was destined to be the hope of the world, as God had promised that in him all the families of the earth should be blessed.

Though no cloud as yet had cast its shade over the bright scene of patriarchal life which we have been contemplating, yet a time of trial was approaching—the last trial through which the patriarch was to be called to pass until he should stand before the throne on high. As the last and most intense flame which was to perfect the gold in the purifying process, so was this ordeal to develop the perfection of a faith which in all trials had never failed, and which was now to shine with transcendent bright-

ness, and become the model of faith to the world, in all time to come. It was not for Abraham alone that he was to pass through the fires in glorifying his God. His faith was to be an example to all generations, and the mode of its trial was to be typically illustrative of a great sacrifice through which the world was to be redeemed to God. It was designed to be the adumbration of an event the most glorious that ever came to the world, and the fulfillment of which would wake the symphonies of new harps in heaven and new songs on earth. It was to create an expectation which would awaken the anxiety of patriarch, prophet and king, and constitute the grand desire of all nations.

Abraham was offering up his sacrifice in the grove of Beer Sheba. The poet beautifully alludes to a historic fact in the religious exercises of the patriarchs, when he says,

“The groves were God’s first temples.”

There the morning and evening sacrifice would ascend, accompanied by fervent prayer to heaven, and there the Great Jehovah, in answer to the simple faith and in confirmation of the simple worship ordained in Eden, would reveal himself and hold communion with the worshipper, as friend holds fellowship with friend. None enjoyed a more free and familiar intercourse with the Almighty than did the patriarch Abraham. He was, not only from the

purity and strength of his faith, called "the father of the faithful," but from his frequent and unbroken communion with Jehovah, he was designated in an eminent sense, "the friend of God."

It was on one of those calm and quiet evenings which are peculiarly adapted to meditation, that the patriarch having offered his sacrifice was absorbed in deep meditation. His prayer had been heard, his sacrifice had been accepted, and the Divine presence and glory were around him. At such a time the mind enjoys a vivid consciousness of spiritual things, and shut off from external objects in its clairvoyant state, beholds unseen realities. The spiritual vision takes in its wide and far reaching scope, the past, the present, and the future. Never before did the mind of Abraham enjoy a greater exaltation. The scenes through which he had passed when God appeared to him on the banks of the Tigris, and his subsequent manifestations as he journeyed from place to place, associated with the wonderful providence which had presided over his destiny, and the remarkable fulfilment of the promise, were all vividly before him. His faith, great before, was strengthened, and realities of the things hoped for, came up before him, and he witnessed, as it were, the unrolling of a grand panorama, exhibiting scenes in the life of his son, as the nations of the earth were blessed through his instrumentality. Ishmael was no more to him. He had part-

ed from him at the Divine command, never more to gaze upon his face again. His affections were now centered upon Isaac, the promised child—the gift of heaven. As the child of a glorious destiny, born under a brighter star than all the kings and princes of Chaldea could boast, his faith assured him that that star would not set until all the Divine promises were fulfilled, and that the same miraculous circumstances which attended his birth would attend his life, and watch over his destiny.

The reverie of the patriarch at length was broken by the Divine voice, which firmly but kindly fell upon his ear, calling him by name. To the Divine call he responded quickly, and said, “Here I am, Lord, what wouldst thou have me do.”

“Take thy son, thine only son, Isaac, and go with him to Mount Moriah, and offer him there to me in sacrifice.”

Did his faith stagger? Not for a moment. Dreadful as was the command, he knew it was from God and all would end right. He felt firmly convinced that should he obey it, and slay his own son on the altar of that mountain, that God would raise him to life again. What Jehovah was about to do was as yet wrapped in a mystery which he could not now solve, but he was fully conscious that he would know thereafter when the work was done.

He rose, and with unfaltering step and unquailing heart returned to his tent, to the smiles and greet-

ings of his beloved Sarah and her son. No cloud was on his brow ; so far from it, the vision and glory of the sacred grove were carried into the tent of his beloved, and dark and mysterious as was the command of Jehovah, his unshaken faith enabled him to realize a perfect submission and resignation. His experience was too deep in the things of God to cause him to falter for a moment, or produce the slightest shade of distrust in the providence of God. That night he went to rest as only those can rest who rest in the arms of Jehovah, and the beautiful visions which came to him in his sleep were only premonitory of the glorious issue of the trial that awaited him.

In the morning he made the necessary preparations for his journey, and taking with him Isaac and two servants, with the necessary beasts of burden, they left for the mountain. It was a three days journey, and when they arrived at the foot of the mountain, in the vale which bounds it on the southwest, they called a halt and tarried for the night. In the beautiful valley on the other side of this mountainous region, Abraham had pitched his tent before, and it was there he was visited by the priest of the most high God, who, as King of Salem, had come down to commune with and bless him on his return from the slaughter of the kings on the sides of Mount Lebanon.

The servants who had accompanied Abraham,

and his son Isaac, to the base of the mountain, were commanded to tarry there until they should ascend its side and offer the sacrifice upon its summit, and return. The wood which had been gathered from the grove of Beer Sheba and prepared for the burnt offering, was now placed upon the shoulder of Isaac, and the father taking the incense burner, in which was the fire taken from the holy altar in the grove, he and the son commenced the ascent of the mountain.

“My father?”

“Here am I, my son.”

“Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?”

“My son, God will provide a lamb for a burnt offering.”

Isaac was too fully instructed in the principles of the patriarchal religion, and too thoroughly impressed with a belief in them, to question for a moment the probability of such a provision on the part of his father's God, and they journeyed on thoughtfully together up the mountain. Having reached the summit, and arrived at the very spot pointed out by Divine direction, Abraham told his son to stop and cast the wood from his shoulder. The patriarch then sat down the incense burner and the knife, and from the stones which covered the summit of the mount he reared an altar on which he placed the sacrificial wood.

But where was the victim? All was now ready, but no lamb was to be seen, and indeed, unless God, should send it, one would hardly stray so far from the flock as to come to that wild mountain solitude. At this crisis of intense and painful interest on the part of Isaac, who carefully watched every movement of his father, Abraham with firm and deliberate step approached his son, and taking a cord, he bound his hands tightly behind him and placed him upon the altar.

The sacred historian did not record the farther conversation that passed between the father and the son. The probability is that the scene was enacted in silence, a sublime and awful silence, like that which reigned in heaven when the angel opened the seventh seal, or that silence which hung on the lips of Jesus when, as a lamb he was led to the slaughter.

The dreadful tragedy proceeds. The patriarch takes the sacrificial knife and raises it aloft to smite his son, his only son, his dearly beloved Isaac. The father's hand trembled not, his heart faltered not, as he proceeded to execute the fearful task. Just as the uplifted hand was about to descend and enter the heart of the victim, a voice, clear and loud, from heaven, broke the awful silence which reigned around and waked the echoes of the mountain. It was the voice of Jehovah. The same all-inspiring and soul-animating voice that called him from Ur of the Chaldees, that conversed with him in Mamre,

and that in Beer Sheba had summoned him to this trial of his faith on Moriah.

“It spoke of peace, it spoke of love,
It spoke as angels speak above,
For O, it was a Father’s voice
Which bade the faithful heart rejoice.”

“Abraham ! Abraham !”

“Here am I,” responded the patriarch.

“Lay not thy hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him, for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me.”

At this the father quickly cut the cords that bound Isaac, and looking round he saw a ram caught by his horns in a thicket close by, and taking it he offered the heaven-sent victim as a burnt offering to the Lord, in the place of his son.

As the smoke ascended from the altar and rose up as a grateful and accepted sacrifice to heaven, Abraham realized that the ground whereon he stood was consecrated, and he called it Jehovah Jireth, as it is said “In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen.” The poet has most beautifully expressed the feelings of the patriarch in the description of the scene.

“He rose up and laid
The wood upon the altar. All was done;
He stood a moment—and a deep quick flush
Passed o’er his countenance, and then he nerved

His spirit with a bitter strength and spoke—
“Isaac! my only son.” —The boy looked up,
And Abraham turned away his face and wept.
“Where is the lamb, my father?” O, the tones,
The sweet the thrilling music of a child!
How doth it agonize at such an hour!
It was the last deep struggle—Abraham held
His loved, his beautiful, his only son,
And lifted up his arm and called on God—
And lo! God’s angel staid him—and he fell
Upon his face and wept.”

Such a trial only he could know, and such a faith only he could have, and he would have passed that trial and clung to that faith if the earth had reeled from her orbit, the sun turned to darkness, and the moon into blood.

The work was done, and the faith of Abraham, like gold seven times tried in the fire, came out perfect. There was no speck or slightest alloy in his spotless, transparent character. His faith was accounted to him for a righteousness which all the works of man could not by any possibility secure, and he thus was made the type of the faithful in all ages, and the great father to the church of a principle which was to constitute the condition of acceptance with God and the agency through which all spiritual good was to come to man. Springing from him was to come forth a seed, numerous as the stars of heaven, who should exhibit as their grand characteristic, and the agency through which all their

mighty achievements were to be effected, a faith in the promise and oath of God, which would afford them the strongest consolation. It was from him that a descendant should spring who would turn aside from the throne and scepter and wealth and pleasures of the mightiest monarchy in the world, and embrace a life of reproach and disgrace and toil and hardship, impelled thereto by a faith which would overleap the present and fasten as an anchor on the rewards of the future. By this faith men were to quench the violence of flames, escape the edge of the sword, stop the mouths of lions, subdue kingdoms, work righteousness, obtain promises, out of weakness be made strong, wax valiant in fight, turn to flight the armies of the aliens. Through this faith also women were to be nerved with an unwonted courage, and were to receive their dead raised to life again, and even to brave tortures, not accepting release therefrom, that they might receive a better resurrection. But time would fail to tell of all its glorious results as the ever progressive developments of it should be exhibited to the world.

But the heavenly communication was not ended. Again the Divine voice is heard resounding through the solitude, "Abraham! Abraham!"

"Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth," immediately responded the patriarch.

"By myself have I sworn, that because thou hast done this thing, and thou hast not withheld thy son,

thine only son, from me, in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is upon the sea shore, and thy seed shall possess the gates of his enemies, and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because thou hast obeyed my voice.”

Isaac had been from his earliest years instructed in the things of God, had always been present at the family devotions, and, as a young priest consecrated to the sacred service, had assisted his father at the holy altar, but never before had the voice of Jehovah fallen upon his ear, and while he was made a partaker of his father’s faith, he was also permitted to witness a confirmation of that faith in the interposition which had been made in his behalf, and the promise and oath made to his father. Heaven-inspired, he felt a new life spring up within him, and the always bright countenance of the youth shone with greater radiance than ever it had done before. It was to him an era in his life never to be forgotten, and served more powerfully than all parental instruction to form a character which was to be connected with some of the most eventful scenes that ever occurred in the life of man. Ishmael was now a wanderer in the deserts of Arabia, the child of a wild and fearful destiny, but Isaac was a partaker of his father’s faith and hope, a child of the most glorious promise, and whose life was to be identified with the destiny of nations to the end of time.

With firm and elastic step, though well stricken in years, the venerable patriarch with his heaven appointed son, descend the mountain, and taking their servants resume their homeward journey. Whether the nature of this journey was known to Sarah or not, the sacred historian does not inform us, but she doubtless waited with anxiety the return of the father and longed again to behold the face of her dearly beloved son. Though the time was short he never had been absent from her sight so long before, and when he bounded into the tent he was instantly caught in the maternal arms and folded to the loving heart of the mother.

Soon after Abraham's return from the sacrifice on Mount Moriah, he received intelligence from his brother Nahor, whom he left in the city of Ur. It had now been a long time since he had left his native land, with its magnificent cities, for a country life in the land of Palestine. Though he often thought of Nineveh and Babylon, and the scenes of his childhood and youth in Ur, with the circumstances connected with his conversion from idolatry, and his call to leave the land for an unknown country, still he had no desire to return. He had proven the great Jehovah thus far, and his faith was more than ever strengthened in regard to the future. The days of his youth had been days of blessedness and bliss uninterrupted. Prosperity and happiness had attended his riper years, and now that old age had come

upon him he realized that his last days were his best days in the service of his God. Though his brother still chose to dwell in Chaldea, the most of his descendants had removed to Padan Aram, in Canaan, and it was through these that the patriarch heard of the condition and circumstances of him and his family. His children had grown up and married. Among the number of those who still resided in the city of Ur, was Bethuel, the youngest son of Nahor, whose union with a fair daughter of Mesopotamia had been blessed with a child of the most remarkable promise. Her name was Rebekah. She had already passed the days of her childhood, and was fast blushing, as the virgin rose, into the maturity of womanhood. Reared under the most genial circumstances, she possessed a native grace and sylphlike form. From a lofty brow fell on each side of her neck curls of dark, flowing, glossy hair. Her eyes were large and black, beautifully overarched by brows of jet, as if penciled with a master hand. Her complexion, though tinged by an oriental sun, was yet clear and transparent. She was the pride of the maidens of Ur, and the young men would seek her for a companion at the sacred festivals.

CHAPTER IX.

GLOOM AND GLADNESS.

ISAAC had passed the years of his minority and had become a man. But still he resided at the paternal mansion, the old homestead to which his father had returned in Mamre, and was the stay and staff of the declining years of his devoted father and mother. Old age had brought feebleness to the limbs of both, and the inclined head and tottering step halted to the tomb. More especially was this the case with the mother. She who in her younger days was the most beautiful of all Chaldea's daughters, and who, even in maturer years surpassed the beauty of Egypt's dark-eyed maidens, and whose dangerous charms had more than once involved Abraham in difficulties, such as only God could deliver him from, was now wrinkled and bent with hoary years; but still age had not effaced all the lines of beauty from that once bright and yet happy countenance. There still lingered enough to show that she had been cast in a finer mould than is usually awarded to the lot of mortals. In the estimation of the patriarch she was a princess still, and none could with her compare. But she had lived out her

allotted time, and her earthly race was run. Calmly and gently she sunk to rest,

“As fades a summer cloud away,
As sinks the gale when storms are o’er;
As gently shuts the eye of day;
As dies a wave along the shore.”

A holy quiet, like that of creation’s first Sabbath morn, pervades the plain of Mamre. It was the last day of summer. The groves and fields of Mamre wear a serene and quiet aspect, and naught but the chirping of the grasshopper and the coo of the mournful dove were heard to break the stillness. The patriarchal encampment seemed solitary and deserted, and the air of stillness which reigned around, save when some servant of the household would be seen moving noiselessly around with sad and dejected countenance, gave unmistakeable tokens that some sad calamity had fallen upon the family of the faithful. And such it was. Death had invaded the encampment, and the beloved and beautiful Sarah was no more. The patriarch’s face is darkened with sorrow as he bows beneath the chastening rod in the tent of affliction. Alas, to him the sad but certain crisis had come, and stricken with grief, his sad heart pours forth his sorrows. In all, however, there was a quiet resignation to the will of God, which could not admit of boisterous grief. Though that beautiful form, pale as the snow, was devoid of life and motion, yet it

was only the casket which contained the immortal gem, and the spirit of the beloved was with angels and God. Though she the fairest of Mesopotamia's daughters, who had grown up under the eye of Abraham in her native land, had clung to him in all the changes of his eventful life, the companion of his wanderings, the partner of his faith, and the comfort of his life, would tread no more among the groves and flowers of Mamre, yet she had entered the heavenly inheritance, and would be permitted to glide forever

“Among the bowers and by the streams
On heaven's delightful shore.”

The light of the tent was gone, and every head was bowed with sorrow, while every eye was bedewed and dimmed with tears at the loss. The numerous servants of the family, old and young, were deeply affected at the loss of their mistress, and wherever the sad intelligence went, it carried mourning, for

“None knew her but to love her,
None named her but to praise.”

In the territory on the north of Mamre and adjoining it, was a rocky cavern, which nature seemed to have hewn out as a place of sepulcher. It was known by the name of the cave of Machpelah. This grotto belonged to prince Ephron the Hittite. Being a beautiful and secluded spot, it occurred to Abraham that he would visit the neighboring prince,

and if possible, purchase the tract of land on which it stood, as a family sepulcher. After the oriental custom of mourning for the dead was ended, he proceeded to visit the prince and make the application for the burial place. On his way he met a multitude of the people of the country, who were his neighbors, and who having heard of the sad calamity, were coming to offer condolence. When he made known to them his desire in regard to Machpelah, they replied,

“Hear us, my lord, thou art a mighty prince among us. In the choice of our sepulchers bury thy dead; none of us shall withhold from thee his sepulcher, that thou mayest bury thy dead.”

“I ask not,” said Abraham, “for any place except Machpelah, and if you will intreat prince Ephron for me, that he will sell it to me, I will purchase it as a possession forever.”

A messenger was soon despatched, and it was not long until Ephron was in the presence of the illustrious patriarch. No sooner had he arrived than in the hearing of all the people assembled, he said,

“My lord, I will not sell thee the field wherein is the cave of Machpelah, but in the presence of the sons of my people I will give it to thee forever as a place of sepulcher.”

At this, Abraham bowed respectfully before all, and said,

“If thou wilt give it, I pray thee hear me; I will

give thee money for the field, and thou must take the price."

Then said Ephron, "The field is worth four hundred shekels of silver, but what is that between me and thee. Take it I pray thee, and bury thy dead."

Abraham counted out the money, and handing it over, received from Ephron a title to the field embracing the rocky grotto and the surrounding grove, to be his as a possession forever.

All the preparations having been made for the funeral, the numerous servants of the house joined in procession with Abraham and Isaac, accompanied by the surrounding princes, and vast multitudes of people from all parts of the country, and Sarah was borne to her rocky tomb amid the lamentations of a thousand voices. The last sad offices being paid to the dead, Abraham turned with his weeping Isaac, and walked trembling to his now desolate home, to wander awhile longer as a pilgrim and sojourner, and then after filling up his allotted time, to be laid by the side of the loved one in the rocky sepulcher until the resurrection morn.

Sarah was now an inhabitant of heaven. Her earthly pilgrimage had ended, and she had taken up her abode among the spirits of the saints in light. The earthly tabernacle was dissolved, but she had assumed a spiritual form, and glided among the shining ranks of angels and spirits glowing with a beauty and filled with a rapture unknown to any

earthly Eden. That voice which she heard only occasionally, but which always made her heart bound with joy, now filled her soul with ceaseless delight. That form divine, which only once she was permitted to gaze upon when it was veiled in humanity, now was ever before her in unveiled glory, such as mortal eye could not behold. She was in heaven, where she saw and heard and knew all that her heart had desired on earth, and as from her heavenly sphere she beheld her weeping companion and her beloved son, she rejoiced to know that in a short time both would join her in the communings of that better world.

CHAPTER X.

THE MESSAGE TO UR.

IN the home of the patriarch all things wore an aspect of loneliness. The wife and mother had been borne to her last resting place in the silent tomb. Her cheerful smile no longer lighted up the tents of Mamre, and her encouraging voice to father and son was no longer to be heard in this world. As Eden itself would have been a wilderness without woman as a companion for man, so Mamre must be desolate without a second princess to grace its dwellings, and rule over them as mistress of the household.

While on an expedition to Damascus in Syria, Abraham had obtained a most valued servant by the name of Eliezer. From his fidelity and the great interest which he took in all things pertaining to the patriarchal household, he had long since been promoted to the office of steward, and to him belonged the oversight of all the immense treasures of the patriarch, as well as the control of all the servants and the affairs of the family in general. Isaac, the child of promise, had ripened into a proud and vigorous manhood, and the father desired, before he should go home and be no more among the living, that his son should form a matrimonial

connexion with some one of his kindred in that far off land from whence, at the Divine command, he had journeyed. He desired not that any alliance should be formed with the inhabitants of Canaan, or that any of his blood should flow through the veins of a nation whose wickedness manifested itself in preferring the worship of a dumb and senseless idol, to that of the one living and true God; and hence he was concerned to witness before his departure from earth, an event which he knew would be fraught with the most important consequences to a posterity which was destined to be numerous as the stars of heaven for multitude.

Calling the faithful Eliezer into his presence, being fully assured that he could be trusted with a matter of such great moment, and knowing that he was interested, not only in what pertained to the family, but in the perpetuation of the patriarchal religion which he embraced, he addressed him in the following oriental style:

“Eliezer, my faithful servant, place thy hand under my thigh and swear by the Lord Jehovah of heaven and earth, that thou wilt not select a wife for my son Isaac from among the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land we dwell, but swear unto me that thou wilt go into my own country, Chaldea, and from among my kindred thou wilt make the choice.”

“I will my Lord. Your commands shall be

obeyed; but perhaps the one I may select will not be willing to come with me to this land. Shall I then take Isaac to Mesopotamia?"

"Nay, Eliezer, thou shalt never take my son thither. The splendor of the cities of Chaldea, and the seductive arts of her priests and astrologers I fear would dazzle his eyes, corrupt his heart, and lead him from the worship of Jehovah. Whatever thou doest, take him not thither, I adjure thee."

"By what light my lord, shall I be guided in my search for the one who is to be the wife of Isaac?"

"The Lord God, who took me from my father's house in Ur, and from my native land, who spoke to me and promised me this land, confirming it by an oath, and thus, by two immutable things in which it was impossible for him to lie, hath ratified his covenant, will send before thee his angel to guide thee in the way."

"But if she come not, my lord, what then?"

"Thou shalt be free from thine oath."

"All is well." So saying he took the oath, and immediately went to work to make preparations for a departure.

The city of Nahor, Abraham's brother, was Ur, situated as we have already seen, between the rivers Euphrates and Tigris. It lay in the midst of the plains of Aram, and hence in Scripture is called Padan Aram. Mamre was four hundred miles distant from this place, and between them were track-

less deserts and towering mountains. Eliezer took ten camels and several servants, with all things necessary for the journey, and departed. Various presents for the kinsman of Abraham, together with many and elaborately wrought jewels of finest gold for the fair one, were all provided; and never was cavalcade more richly freighted than the one which was now leaving the plains of Mamre for the land of Chaldea.

The direction which the caravan was to take lay south-eastwardly, and the site of the doomed cities was in their route. On the evening of the first day the train descended the mountain which skirted on the west and south the plain of Sodom, and as they cast their eyes upon the valley below, they saw stretching away for many miles, embracing the whole valley even up to the base of the mountain, a vast lake of dark, gloomy motionless waters. Eliezer had seen this valley before, when it was covered with rich pastures and dotted with magnificent cities. With his master he had gazed upon it when the Jordan flowed midway through its living green, and the bright rippling waters sparkled in the sunshine or reflected the milder light of the moon and stars. But now, alas, the verdure and flowers and trees and cities were gone, and from the surface of that dark, leaden, stagnant sea there was no light or beauty. All was desolation. The sickening sun looked wan, as muffled in its vapors it cast its lurid

glare at departing, like a broad eye of wrath, upon its God-smitten waters. The bird of Paradise, which was wont to nestle in the bowers of this once "garden of the Lord," had sought another home, and no living thing was seen to grow upon its banks, or move among the dark, overhanging, craggy cliffs, which frowned back the shadows of the sullen tide. Tide,—it had none: all was dead, motionless, as its rocky shores. All that remained of life was the small, half-deserted village of Zoar, on the side of the mountain which the camels were now descending. Lot was still here with his daughters, all that was left of Sodom, to wonder at its unhappy fate, and drop the tear of sympathy upon its ashes. Farther down the mountain, and near to the water's edge rose an incrustated monument, dark and shapeless, like a beacon on some dangerous coast to warn of wreck and ruin. After gazing upon the sad sight, Eliezer turned in to the gate and was kindly received and entertained by his master's kinsman during the night.

Early the next morning, before the sun had ascended the mountain which rose up from the farther shore of the Dead Sea, the train was in motion, and following the coast in a southerly direction a short distance, it entered the wilderness, and thence taking an easterly direction, as pointed out by the angel guide, the company traveled on over the drifting sands and through the craggy defiles of Arabia

Petræa. It was a long and tedious journey, and the route was such, perhaps, as never had been traveled before. An angel was their guide, however, and we may readily presume that it was the nearest and most practicable route that could have been taken. How long they were in performing the journey, we know not, as sacred history is silent on the subject. Nor is it important that we should know: suffice it to say, that at length the caravan descended a gorge of the mountain which they had crossed in their journey into the broad and fertile plains of Mesopotamia.

The broad, bright disc of an Assyrian sun, was partly concealed by the distant horizon as they came in sight of the long sought city. Its black square temple towering high above the city walls, on the summit of which perpetually burned the sacred fire, could be distinctly seen as if painted against the glowing sky. All nature wore an aspect of calmness and beauty—the grain, still in its early verdure, waved to the gentle air, while the meadows, thickly covered with luxuriant grass and enameled with flowers of every hue, were scattering richest perfume on every breath that fanned them. The shades of evening were beginning slowly to creep down the sides of the Tyari and envelop the city of Nahor in that soft haze of twilight beauty, so peculiar to eastern climes. The hum of busy industry was dying away, the lowing herds were returning

leisurely to their homes, and the maidens, as was the custom of olden time, were seen to sally forth gleefully with their pitchers from the massy gates, to draw water from the wells of the surrounding grottos.

Directed by the angel, Eliezer drew up his train at one of these wells, and dismounting, he commanded all the camels to kneel in semi-circular form, with the servants at their side. This being done, he advanced a short distance and falling prostrate upon the green sward, he exclaimed, "O, Lord God of my master Abraham, I pray thee send me good speed, and show kindness to my master, Abraham. Behold, I am here by the well of water, and the maidens of the city have come hither to draw water. Let it be, O Lord, that the one whom I shall ask to let down her pitcher and give me to drink, let the same be the chosen one whom thou hast selected for thy servant, Isaac. Then shall I know that thou hast shown kindness to my master." Scarcely had the venerable servant arisen to his feet ere a damsel approached. "She was fair to look upon." Fairest of the fair throng gathered there, her singular beauty of form and feature, at once arrested the attention of Eliezer. Her dark, lustrous eye, as she cast a glance at the stranger with his kneeling caravan, as the eye only can speak, communicated to the soul of the faithful steward an intelligence not to be mistaken in regard to the visit.

As she drew the water and gracefully threw back her curls of glossy hair, which fell in dark ringlets over her face, to poise the brimfull vessel on her shoulder, she hastened to bound away over the now star-lit path, back to the city. But she had not proceeded far until she was overtaken by the anxious Eliezer, who, addressing her in soft and gentle accents, said,

“I pray thee give me to drink.”

Turning round, Rebecca dropped her pitcher quickly upon her hand, and replied, “Drink, my lord.”

After Eliezer had done drinking, the kind and gentle damsel said, “I will draw water for thy camels, also, that they may drink.” By this the servant was assured that the wife of Isaac stood before him; and so overjoyed was he at the successful issue of his toilsome and responsible mission that he was silent while the beautiful damsel drew the water and filled the trough for the thirsty camels. Filled with admiration and wonder at what he witnessed, he knew not what to say, or how to act, but bowing himself before the Lord, he gave thanks for the prosperity which had crowned his mission. Had he not been secretly conscious when he first gazed upon the fair face of the beautiful stranger, that she was the divinely appointed one he sought, her benevolence and hospitality would have at once wrought such a conviction in his mind. No sooner

had she performed her kind offices, which she did in an almost incredibly short space of time, than the liveried servant approached her and placed upon her arms two massive bracelets of fine gold, ten shekels in weight, and also presented her with other jewels of the richest and most elaborate workmanship. Then addressing her, he said,

“Whose daughter art thou, my fair one?”

“I am the daughter of Bethuel, the son of Milcah, my lord.”

“Is there room in thy father’s house for us to lodge?”

“We have plenty of room, and an abundance for thy servants and camels.” So saying she departed for the city.

At this Eliezer again prostrated himself, and said, “Blessed be the Lord God of my master, Abraham, who hath manifested his mercy and truth in leading me to the house of my master’s kindred.” Scarcely had he finished his prayer until he saw a young man running towards him at full speed. It was Laban, the brother of Rebecca, who had informed him of all she had seen and done. Approaching Eliezer he addressed him thus, “Come in thou blessed of the Lord, wherefore standest thou without. I have prepared the house, and room for the camels.” Soon the caravan entered the gates of the city, and giving the camels into the hands of the servants, Eliezer entered the palace of Bethuel, and it was not long

until the girdle and sandals were removed, and he and his company were invited to partake of the evening repast. His mission, however, was of too great importance to allow him to wait until he had taken refreshments before making it known, and after introducing himself as the servant of Abraham, and rehearsing all the circumstances connected with his errand in detail, and informing them of the greatness and princely wealth of his master, he bowed himself before the family and asked if his master's wishes could be granted. The father and son, being entirely satisfied that the whole arrangement was divinely superintended, nodded assent, but cast their eyes upon the mother and daughter. They were attentive observers of what had been said. Rebecca hung upon her mother's neck in tears, and the maternal bosom heaved with wild emotion. They were silent, but it was the silence which, if it may not be construed as an absolute assent to the proposal, at least gave strong indications that the objections were not insuperable, at least so the servant understood it, and blessing the Lord God of Abraham, he rose from the floor, and ordering his servants to bring in the treasure, he poured at the feet of Rebecca the most costly jewels, drapery and robes, that wealth could purchase, at the same time bestowing upon the mother and brother the richest presents. It was now growing late, and after partaking of the bountiful repast spread before him, they all retired to rest.

Morning came, and the anxious servant addressing Bethuel, said, "I pray thee, my lord, give me Rebecca, that I may return with her to my master." To this Laban and the mother responded, "Be not in haste. Let her tarry with us for the space of ten days, and then she shall go with thee."

"Hinder me not, I pray thee, seeing the Lord hath prospered me so well. Send me away, that I may go to my master."

"We will call Rebecca and she shall answer for herself."

So saying, she was soon in their presence, and when the mother with faltering voice asked her if she was willing to leave her father's house and mother's care, for a distant land, never perhaps to look upon the faces of the loved ones at home again, she resolutely but with deep feeling replied, "The Lord's will be done, I go to fulfil my destiny in the land of promise." The mother's heart was touched and she embraced her only daughter and wept. It was a great sacrifice, equivalent almost to burying her from her sight forever; but she gave her up with a mother's blessing. Laban approached and taking her from the arms of her weeping mother, embraced her and said, "Thou art our sister, be thou the mother of thousands, of millions, and let thy seed possess the gate of those which hate them. Go, my sister, and the God of Abraham and Haran and Nahor go with thee."

Soon all was in readiness for the departure. The servants of Abraham brought up the camels in front of the palace. One, richly caparisoned, was made to kneel, and the proudest and most beautiful of Chaldea's daughters was soon in the saddle. Another, and her old maid servant, who had nursed her from her infancy, was mounted and by her side. Then Eliezer and the servants mounted their camels, and, waving a last adieu, the gates of Ur were passed and the cavalcade was on its way. As they passed the grotto and hastened over the plain, before the eye of Rebecca rose the scenes of her childhood, never, perhaps, to be looked upon again. The tear came unbidden to her eyes and bedewed the silken lashes as she cast a last and lingering look upon the receding valley, upon whose peaceful bosom rose dim in the distance the beloved city, her childhood's home. The walls, and tower with its perpetual fire ascending to the god of day, were all that she could distinguish, and it was not long until a turn in the gorge of the mountain forever obstructed them from her sight. Wild summits rose on either side casting their shadows on her way, and anon she would come out on an open space where she could behold, spread out before her, luxuriant plains with isles of foliage, and beyond, the distant mountains rising up against the far off sky. Day after day passed, and ever varying scenes presented themselves as she journeyed on, but in the midst of

all the excitements by which she was surrounded, the scenes and associations of home would crowd upon her thoughts and fill her mind with intense emotions.

Under ordinary circumstances nothing could have induced Rebecca to have left her home and kindred for a land of strangers, and to take to herself for a companion for life, one whom she had never seen. But the wonderful train of events connected with the visit of the venerable servant of Abraham, and the interest shown by that patriarch, whose knowledge and piety were held in the highest esteem by all the family as well as the priests and astrologers of Babylon, Nineveh and Ur, wove around her a web of destiny from which she could not escape; and besides, she felt her heart strangely and wonderfully drawn out after the young stranger who sought her hand. She felt that she dare not resist the influence that was drawing her so powerfully away from her father's care and mother's love, and from all the hallowed associations of her childhood's home. At times it seemed as if she had awakened from a dream, in which she had been carried away from home and friends to desert regions by some chieftain's band, but she had returned home and heard again her mother's voice and joined in the innocent glee of the city maidens; but alas, the surrounding desert, and dangerous defiles through which she was passing, would rouse her from her

reverie and recall her actual condition. Often, after the fatigues of the day, had she wept herself to sleep in her tent, upon the faithful breast of her childhood nurse; but in the midst of all she felt a calm and quiet resignation, and the promise of the great Jehovah in relation to her future destiny would still the throbbings of her heart and chase her fears away. At length the cavalcade reaches the end of the desert and enters the southern borders of Palestine.

Isaac, filled with anxiety in regard to the result of the journey undertaken by Eliezer, and judging that it was about time for him to return, had come down from Mamre to Lahai-roi, where there was a famous well. All travelers across the desert would stop at this well for rest and refreshment, and Isaac, therefore, had taken up his abode here for the purpose of waiting the arrival of his father's servants from Mesopotamia. One evening, while he was walking out in the field which stretched down towards the desert, meditating upon the perils of the journey and the probabilities of success, he was awakened from his reverie by seeing in the distance a train of camels emerging from behind a cliff, on the side of the distant mountain. The cliff was thickly studded with accacia trees, and he could only see the long necks of the camels, with an occasional glimpse of their riders as a short turn in the mountain path would reveal them to his excited

gaze. He saw enough to convince him that the long looked for train was coming, and soon would be in the plain.

“Who is that, Eliezer, walking yonder in the field?” said Rebecca, as from the mountain path they saw in the distance a tall young man, of dignified mien, walking leisurely along, with arms folded as if in meditative mood.

“That is my young master, Isaac. He waits our coming.”

At this Rebecca threw her long thick veil over her face, entirely concealing her features, and the train hurried on. Soon the foot of the mountain was reached, and they entered the plain.

The sun was tinging the tops of the distant mountains with his parting beams, and bathing the valley in its golden light as the travelers approached, and when they reached the spot where Isaac stood they form a circle around him, and the camels kneel while Eliezer and the servants bow themselves to the earth in obeisance to their young master. In few words Eliezer related the incidents of the journey, and closed by introducing Rebecca, who stood veiled before him. Taking her by the hand, Isaac replaced her in the saddle, and mounting another camel himself, the party journeyed on towards Mamre. A fleet messenger from Lahai-roi had been dispatched to herald their approach, and when they arrived, which was about midnight, the groves and

tents of Mamre were illumined with a thousand lamps, and all the inhabitants were in readiness to receive the bridegroom and his bride. When Isaac approached with his lovely charge, the procession, which had come out to meet him with their torches, opened right and left, and alighting from their camels, followed by the faithful Eliezer and Rebecca's servant, the welcome company pass into the tent of the departed mother, where the patriarch received, embraced, and kissed his daughter. Joy again had come to Mamre, and every heart was filled with rapturous delight as Abraham, with his numerous friends, confederates, and family sat down to the sumptuous bridal feast.

Just before the solemnization of the marriage, a servant entered the tent, and addressing Abraham, said,

"My lord, an Arabian prince and his wife are without, who having traveled a long and weary journey, ask permission to tarry for the night."

"Let the stranger be admitted. Abraham never turned away the stranger from his tent. His joy is too great now to hesitate in extending the rites of hospitality. Bid him come in."

Soon was ushered into the tent a tall, dark Arabian chief, whose warlike dress and nodding plumes contrasted well with the simple yet beautiful habit of his dark-eyed companion, who entered, gracefully holding the skirt of her flowing robe in

one hand, and with the other clung to the arm of her husband. Abraham welcomed the stranger to the hospitalities of his tent, and after partaking of refreshments with the numerous company assembled, they witnessed the marriage ceremonies. The chieftain gazed upon the imposing scene with an absorbing interest, and when at its close the venerable patriarch pronounced the blessing of heaven upon Isaac and his blooming Chaldean bride, a tear might have been seen to steal from the dark lashes of the stranger's eye, and fall upon his slightly curled and tremulous lip, as he drew more closely his companion to his side. No sooner was the ceremony over than the chieftain and his wife bowed a graceful farewell, and notwithstanding the entreaties of Abraham to tarry for the remainder of the night, they silently withdrew, and mounting their Arabian horses were soon lost to sight in the woods that skirted the distant plain. Whence came and whither went these mysterious strangers was often a matter of wonder to the patriarch of Mamre.

CHAPTER XI.

THE WILD MAN OF PROPHECY.

ISHMAEL, the name given by the angel of the Lord to Hagar as the name of her child before he was born, hath much in its meaning. In the Hebrew tongue it signifies “heard of God,” or “the Lord careth for him.” When cast out from his father’s house and sent with his mother, a fugitive abroad, and he was ready to perish in the bleak and barren deserts of Arabia, his sad, despairing, dying moan was heard and the angel of the covenant appeared and granted him relief, assuring his mother that the child which she had borne, and whose destiny had been so eventful, was to be the progenitor of a great nation.

We have already seen that Hagar and Ishmael, after the wonderful interposition in their behalf, remained in the wilderness. Though she had intended to return to Egypt, and was shaping her course thitherward as well as she knew from the directions given her by Abraham, the appearance of the Lord to her and the announcement in regard to her son’s destiny, determined her to remain in the desert and wait the openings of Providence, as the wonderful destiny of her only child should be unfolded. After

remaining a short time at the fountain in the desert, fearing to leave it lest they should again be lost in the dreary and desolate wastes around them, they espied in the distance a large cavalcade approaching. As the procession drew nearer they discovered by their dress and movements that they were Arabs, the inhabitants of the desert and the original inheritors of the land. Soon the train arrived at the fountain, and from the kneeling camels the Arab chief and his followers alighted to partake of the refreshing waters and refill their leathern bottles to supply them on their journey. They were on their way to the passes of the El Ghor, on the northern coast of the Arabian gulf, for the purpose of intercepting travelers from Egypt to Canaan and Persia, and of carrying on their depredations as fate or fortune might dictate. They were all armed with a bow and spear, and wore a fierce and warlike expression. Rough as was their exterior, and unknown as was their language, the military dress and the martial air of the company instead of filling young Ishmael with fear, inspired him with a wild delight, and as he gazed upon the ostrich plumes and richly embroidered dress of the chieftain, who smiled upon him as he approached, he thought within himself how desirable would be such a life. He was now thirteen years of age and a youth of wild and reckless daring. His mother was a dark but beautiful Egyptian, and though not so dark as her, yet he had

her black and piercing eye and symmetrical form added to bold manly features for a youth of his age. The chief of the tribe was at once interested in the boy, and handing him a bow and quiver, as if to ascertain whether he knew their use, he soon found the boy was at home in the sports of the field. When the company were ready for departure, the chief addressed the mother by signs, to know if she would consent to suffer the lad to accompany them. From the interest which she saw Ishmael took in the strangers, and regarding it as providential, she consented on condition that they would take her along. To this the chief assented, and soon mother and boy, after having partaken of some dates and wine, were mounted on fleet dromedaries, and the caravan was under way to its place of destination.

The tribe was one of the most desperate that occupied the wilderness of Sin, and had its strong holds in the fastnesses of the mountains of Horeb and Sinai. Many a caravan of merchants had been attacked by the proud chief who always led on his band in person, and was plundered of its treasures after the conquest. After traveling hard all day at length night came on, and they pitched their tents for refreshment and rest. What time the chief had to spare from the command of his tribe he spent with his young favorite and his mother, and showed them every kindness of which an Arab is capable.

On one occasion, after the journey of the day

had ended and Hagar and Ishmael were alone in their tent, the latter busily engaged in stringing his bow and the former lost in meditation, the mother commenced unconsciously singing one of her childhood songs, for her mind in brooding over its various fortunes had wandered back to its Egyptian home. It was in the Egyptian tongue, and scarcely had she finished one strain ere the chief entered in great haste, and addressing her in Egyptian, asked her if she could speak that language. To this of course she responded in the affirmative, as it was her mother tongue. Soon, to the astonishment of young Ishmael, his mother and the chief were engaged in a rapid conversation. When the chief was but a mere boy he was along with his father's tribe, and while engaged in a conflict with Egyptians he was taken prisoner, and remained in this condition until he became acquainted with the language. He was finally liberated on condition that he would remain in Egypt and serve the king, to which he assented. But he sighed for his wild mountain home in the wilderness and the inspiring scenes of his boyhood, and being unwilling to remain, though a bright career spread out before him, he made his escape and returned to the land of his nativity. His father having died, he became the chief of the Sinaitic tribe. In turn, Hagar related to the chief the incidents of her past life, and the circumstances which drove her into the wilderness. As the result of this

interview the chief adopted Ishmael as his son, and immediately commenced teaching him the Arabic language, manners, and customs, with an interest he had never known before.

Day after day the powerful tribe urged their way over the now rough and rocky road. They had left the sands and were among the continuous precipices and defiles of Arabia Petræa. At length they came to the terrible pass of which we have spoken. It was a gloomy defile, and seemed once to have been the bed of a mountain torrent. At the entrance of the chasm between the mountains which rose up perpendicularly five hundred feet in height, was a grove of cypress and accacia trees, which cast a deep shade from the sides, and projected over as if guarding the entrance to the valley of the shadow of death itself. Wild fig and oleander trees grew out of the craggy sides of the mountain gorge throughout its entire length. Masses of rock of enormous magnitude seemed to have been thrown together by some wild convulsion of nature, forming as it were stepping stones for a race of giants, on both sides of which towering crags overhung the abyss, which at some places nearly uniting overhead would shut out the light of day, throwing a gloomy grandeur over the scene below. Not far from the entrance of this frightful pass was a huge cavern which spread away into the darkness, in the recesses of which were many apartments. The burning sun of the desert

penetrated not the depths of this wild mountain cavern, and its refreshing coolness invited the weary traveler to repose. Every apartment was known to the chief and his men, as it had been the fortress and hiding place of the Sinaitic tribe from an early day. The innermost apartment which was occupied by the chief was soon lighted up by lamps suspended from the sides and ceiling. Into this apartment Hagar and Ishmael were introduced. The tribe, which was numerous, was divided into companies and sought their respective apartments in the spacious cavern. The camels were unladen of their treasures, consisting of fine linen from Egypt, silks and spices from Ispahan and Arabia Felix, and precious jewels from Hydravant. They had also brought with them a bountiful supply of figs, dates, and dried grapes, with wine, and palm and olive oil. This wandering tribe carried every thing with them necessary to afford them the most sumptuous living. Their tents, for which they had now no use either to screen them from the scorching rays of the sun by day or the drenching dews by night, were spread upon the rocky floors of their apartments, which being covered with the skins of Cashmere, made an inviting repose for the weary.

Here, day after day as the chief would converse with his adopted son, through his mother, the time passed pleasantly away. Ishmael was becoming rapidly acquainted with the Arabic language, and

was soon able to hear and answer questions asked him by members of the tribe, among all of whom he was becoming a great favorite. From this retreat he would frequently sally forth with his bow on a hunting excursion, with some trusty Arab, among the mountain fastnesses, and his skill as an archer was often demonstrated as a wild goat or a mountain roe would become the victim of his steady aim. On other occasions he would astonish the whole tribe by the precision with which he would throw the dart, often bearing off the palm from all competitors. Frequently the boy, unknown to his mother and the chief, as if impatient of restraint, would start off unattended and enter upon all the exciting scenes of the chase. On one occasion the whole tribe was alarmed at the apprehension that he was slain by wild beasts or killed by falling over some precipice, or perhaps taken by some warlike tribe, upon which, in his wanderings, he had fallen. Night had come and darkness reigned around. The El Ghor was covered with midnight gloom, but still he came not. Couriers were dispatched in every direction. The mother's heart sank within her, and when morning came bringing no tidings of the lost boy, she would have yielded to despair had she not recollected the promise of the Divine Being in regard to the destiny of her son. Another band was dispatched, consisting of twelve. They were divided into four companies and were to go out three east, three west,

three north, and three south, and enjoined not to return until some tidings of Ishmael could be heard, or some clue by which he could be found. Day after day passed away, but they came not. Another band was started and another day of anxiety passed, but alas, no tidings greeted the ears of the watchers. Just as they were about again to retire for the night, having given up all hopes of receiving any intelligence from the lost, the loud blast of a trumpet was heard echoing along the mountains and winding through the El Ghor. The fearful suspense was broken. The lost was found; but whether the fearless boy was living or dead none but the returning messengers could tell! The blasts became louder and more frequent as the detachment neared the cavern. The chief and Hagar hastened down to the entrance of the pass, and soon in the light of the torches which illumined the valley, they beheld mounted on the foremost steed—a fleet Arabian courser—their idol boy. Though he was daring and reckless he had a kind and generous heart, and seeing his mother he bounded from his saddle and was caught in her arms. Dispatches were sent in the other directions with trumpets to recall the messengers.

“Where have you been, Ishmael, my son?” exclaimed the overjoyed mother.

“I was taken, while hunting in the valley, by a wandering tribe, and carried to Ezion Geber.”

“Did they treat thee kindly, my son?”

“Kindly, my mother, and gave me that beautiful Arab courser and many other presents, among which was this sword,” which he drew at the same time from its scabbard by his side, the jewels of whose hilt glittered in the light of the torches by which he was surrounded.

“Did they wish you to stay with them?”

“They took me to their castle and showed me all its beautiful things, and told me if I would become one of their tribe I should be the son of their chief, Abdul-foi. But I told them I was the son of a mighty chief already. ‘Ah, but,’ said they, ‘thou art our prisoner, and can never return to thy father, nor see thy mother more.’”

“How didst thou escape from the castle?”

“One night when all were lost in mirth and wine, I mounted my steed, smote down the sentinel, passed the gate, and bounded like a deer into the desert. After traveling all night, just as the sun was breaking over the distant mountains, I beheld in the distance a tent on the plain, above which waved the flag of our tribe, and soon I was with my friends and on my homeward journey.”

“God be praised, my son, for thy deliverance.” So saying, the assembled group repaired to the cavern, and there was joy and rejoicing, for he who had been mourned as dead was alive again, and he who had been lost was found.

The next day all the remaining parties that had been sent out in search of Ishmael returned to the cavern, and day after day passed away without any event occurring to disturb the quiet of the Arabs. They were evidently, however, becoming tired of waiting for spoils, and their wandering habits were such that they could not remain much longer in that position. The highest happiness of the tribe consisted in the excitement of an attack upon their warlike neighbors or the armed caravans of merchants laden with treasures going to or returning from the distant east. They were growing impatient and restless, and having exhausted almost every expedient to keep up that wild excitement suited to their warlike and wandering natures, many became anxious to leave the pass and start upon some fresh enterprize. Long since, they learned from a captive, that on the shore of the Mediterranean sea there was a fortified town abounding in treasures received from the distant west, and from thence transported across the country to the east, and it had often occurred to them that depredations could with ease be committed upon the caravans that would amply repay them for the undertaking. Encouraged, however, by their chief, in whom they had the most unlimited confidence, they concluded to content themselves with their present position.

At length the long looked for period arrived. A sentinel at the western extremity of the Ghor, de-

scried approaching an immense caravan from Egypt, laden with precious commodities for the distant east, and he hastened with rapid pace to make known the approach of the travelers to the chief of the tribe.

Soon all was astir with excitement, and every preparation was made for an attack. Once within the dark pass, the Egyptians, however numerous or well armed, must fall a prey to the warlike Arab, whose skill and desperate hardihood were more than a match for the most thoroughly armed and powerful caravan. At length the tramp of the camels' feet was heard resounding along the defile and echoing through the caverns of the El Ghor. It was, as we have already seen, a frightful pass and always attended with danger; forming as it did the nearest route to the east, by many miles, it was invariably chosen when the caravans of merchantmen were sufficiently numerous and armed for security and defense. Could they but succeed in getting safely beyond this boundary into the open desert they had but little to fear, as the means of defense and the opportunities of escape from their wild Arab enemies, were such as to inspire them with confidence in the success of their journey.

But hark! A cry is heard. The daring chief having sallied forth at the head of his men, with wild and frantic shouts attacks in front and on the sides, while the warriors issuing from their hiding

places in the dark caverns rush with fury on the advancing cavalcade. There was a manly and desperate resistance on the part of the Egyptians, but in the dreadful slaughter they fell before the resistless arm of the mighty chief and his warriors, and unable any longer to withstand the onslaught of the foe, and all retreat being cut off, they gave themselves up, and with their immense treasures became captives, and their goods the spoils of the wild Arab tribe. What were left unslain were bound and taken prisoners into the spacious cavern, to be exchanged for Arab prisoners in Egypt. The camels were secured, and with the treasures they bore were taken into the cavern also, where they were unladen of their spoils. The dead were borne off to dark and dangerous defiles, where they were cast down and left to moulder in the winds and rains of heaven, and in a few hours the pass was cleared of all, and no sign was left of the deadly affray save the dark spots, with occasional pools of blood, with which the rocky pavement of the pass was discolored. The descending sun was throwing its last faint rays of light adown the narrow opening above, as the wild and blood-thirsty plunder loving Arabs commenced their revelry and riot over the spoils of their Egyptian prisoners.

But where was Ishmael, the brave and reckless son of Hagar? Did his love for his mother's nation stay his hand in the conflict? It might have un-

nerved his arm, or at least caused him to hesitate, young and thoughtless as he was, had he not realized that he was a child of prophecy, and that Jehovah himself had decreed his destiny, the fulfilment of which was to be brought about by a ceaseless and interminable war through all his generations, without any regard whatever to country or kindred. His hand was to know no peace and his heart was to be nerved with a hostility that should last as long as he lived, and when its fitful impulses should be still in death, through all his descendants, to the latest generation, that inborn hostility should continue as long as nation should lift up sword against nation. The first lesson he received from his mother in childhood, as he hung upon her breast and drank in the bewildering light of her dark eye and the inspiring tones of her rich voice, was that of the mysterious prophecy which betokened his fortune and sealed his fate. He knew enough to know that he was immortal till his destiny on earth was fulfilled, and that as a child of prophecy nothing could avert that destiny.

In the midst of the deadly conflict Ishmael was by the side of the Arab chief, his adopted father, and with a strong and dexterous hand dealt merciless blows upon the armed merchantmen and their servants. Mounted on his Arab charger, his tall plume was to be seen nodding in the thickest of the fight. Many fell beneath the sword and spear of that young warrior.

As the young hero was rushing upon an Egyptian prince who was cutting his way bravely through the Arab band, with his daughter by his side—a slender but graceful and beautiful Egyptian whose dark eye gleamed with the fire of woman's valor, and who seemed to be inspired with a super-human strength and fortitude as she smote off with her glittering sword the hand that had aimed a deadly thrust at her father—he saw, as the eye of the prince met his, something that, quick as thought, arrested his attention and as suddenly determined him on saving his life and that of his daughter. A word from the young chieftain arrested the arm of a swarthy Arab who was just in the act of thrusting through with a dart the heroic princess.

Just then a shout, which rose above the din of battle, was heard from the chief of the tribe announcing the cessation of hostilities and the achievement of a victory, and Ishmael led the prince and his daughter into the cavern and introduced them to the apartment of his father.

When the eyes of Hagar fell upon the young and beautiful princess, she grew pale, and approaching her with all the tenderness of a mother, she spoke to her words of kindness in her native tongue, and embraced her in her arms. The scene touched the heart of Ishmael, and for the first time he felt emotions, strange yet blissful, rise up in his soul as he contemplated the person of the young stranger. His

had been an eventful life. He had grown up under peculiar circumstances, and the sad history of the past kept vividly before him by the hard fortunes of his mother, the only being on earth that he loved, had soured his nature and steeled his heart against mankind. There was a wildness in his eye, a frown upon his brow, and a scorn upon his lip which served as the index of his heart. But the eye lost its wildness, and the frown and scorn were succeeded by a smile which overspread his features, even as the bright sunlight falls upon the landscape after the storm-cloud has passed away. Among the maidens of Mamre or Beer-Sheba he had seen none whose gracefulness of form and beauty of person could vie with the lovely being now before him. Her brave and heroic bearing in the deadly strife, when she seemed like an angel life-guard to her father, inspired him, as he gazed upon her in the conflict, with a reverence; but now that he saw her unarmed and gentle as a lamb, with downcast eyes whose long dark silken lashes veiled their light and fire, he felt an interest in her which, to him, was strange and inexplicable. No excitement of the chase, or that produced by the storm of battle, was half so deep and tumultuous as that which he felt rising within him.

Soon the Arab chief entered, and, as we have before seen, being acquainted with the Egyptian tongue, he and the merchant prince were engaged

in a conversation which was had in an under tone and lasted for some hours. In the midst of the conversation, however, the company were served with a most bountiful and rich repast.

In all parts of the cavern lights were gleaming from a hundred lamps, in the glare of which could be seen groups of warriors feasting, while around them scattered here and there in thick profusion, were bales composed of the richest products of Egypt's proud capital. In dark recesses, chained to the rocky walls, could be seen the prisoners who had been taken in the conflict.

About midnight a council of the sub-chiefs was called in the apartment of the head chief, and while they are engaged in consultation in regard to the prisoners and the spoils of war, we will take another look at the group in another apartment, immediately adjoining the one occupied by the council. Ishmael had been called with the rest, but just as he is leaving he received a soft but imploring look from the young princess which thrilled him through his entire being. It was with great reluctance he left, but duty called and he must obey. The interest felt by the mother for the young stranger seemed almost to equal that of the son. Scarcely had Ishmael left the apartment ere she folded the princess again in her arms and imprinted many a fond kiss upon her forehead and lips. Many were also the words of kindness and promise she poured into the ears of the

now confiding maiden. Reclining upon the soft skin of a leopard, in a richly furnished and brilliantly lighted apartment that more resembled a saloon than a cavern, the hours passed pleasantly away. The maiden forgot her sorrows and her home in the soft endearing tones of Hagar, and ere the council was ended, locked fast in each other's embrace, two of Egypt's fairest daughters, resembling each other in form and features enough to have been taken for mother and daughter, were lost in slumber's peaceful repose.

The reader will now with us leave the sleepers to their untroubled slumber, and we will look into the other apartment. The object of the council having been to make a disposition of the prisoners and the spoils, it was agreed, after mature deliberation, that a division of the latter be made among the chiefs and their men, reserving the usual portion for the leader, and as the young chief, Ishmael, was somewhat acquainted with the Egyptian language as well as the Arabic, which he had acquired with great ease and now spoke with considerable fluency, he should be sent with a detachment of the tribe to Egypt with the prisoners.

When the morning came and the blast of the trumpet echoing along the sides and from the vaulted roof of the cavern announced the hour for refreshment, Ishmael sallied forth to his mother's apartment with palpitating heart, anxious once more to

look upon the face of the fair Egyptian. Mother and maiden greeted him with a smile, and when he announced the freedom of her father and the arrangements made for their return to Egypt in safety, she advanced and kneeling before him extended her hand, which he kissed with passionate fondness. It was agreed, also, that Hagar should accompany her son, and the time for departure being set and all things in readiness, the prisoners, with the detachment headed by the young chief, started out upon their journey.

Ishmael had never seen the sacred river of Egypt. He had often heard his mother speak of the magnificent palaces and mighty temples of the Nile, and felt a greater desire to visit No Ammon, the city of his mother, than he did to look upon the gorgeous palaces and temples of Nineveh and Babylon. Now that his wishes were about to be realized he felt new emotions rise up within him which he could not find language to describe, as on his Arabian steed he rode proudly beside the beautiful Egyptian, and conversed upon various topics connected with their journey.

It was not many days until, after emerging from the desert, the broad and beautiful valley of the Nile spread out before them, dotted all over with villas embowered in groves of orange and lemon trees, whose fragrance perfumed the air and filled the senses with a bewitching sweetness. Though

the mind of the Egyptian maiden had been filled with visions of the glory of the distant east, and had often anticipated the pleasure she would enjoy in the lovely vales of Persia, the fairy palaces of Iran, or the dreamlike bowers of Eden on the banks of the Tigris, yet she realized, after all the trials she had passed, that the flowers and streams of her native land were lovelier than all the pictured beauty of a distant clime.

CHAPTER XII.

EGYPTIAN MYSTERIES.

AFTER many days travel, at length the company drew near the capital of Egypt. The accacia, with its beautiful white and fragrant flowers, beneath whose shade the timid antelope found shelter, which grew in great abundance on the shore of the Red sea, and were to be found in occasional patches along the desert route, had now disappeared and given place to groves of palm, orange, date, apricot, and olive trees, which made the route of the travelers seem like a journey through a continuous pleasure garden.

We have in a preceding chapter given a description of the renowned city to which they were journeying. Its huge monuments rose up in towering grandeur before them as they advanced towards the city from the western plain. There they stood in long rows, as if so many sentinels guarding the entrance to Egypt's proud capital. Entering the avenue leading into the city from the west, and passing between rows of sphinxes of colossal magnitude which stood at regular intervals on either side, they alight in front of an immense portico forming the western entrance to the royal palace,

supported by a marble colonnade of the most elaborate and beautiful workmanship. The servants being given over to the master of the palace, Ishmael and the captive merchant princes ascend the lofty steps, enter the audience chamber and are soon in the presence of the king. The signet is presented, and in due time the officers of the army with the magicians and priests, are called in council with the king. The Arab chief relates the circumstances connected with the capture of the merchantmen and their servants, and details the purport of his mission to the court of Egypt, whereupon, the king, according to the laws of the land, accepted the proposals and agreed to exchange prisoners, Arab for Egyptian, according to the number of captives. The father and daughter were thus restored to their family, and all the merchants and servants were set at liberty.

When it was known that Ishmael's mother was at one time a maid of honor in the royal court, and was remembered by many on account of her rare beauty and personal accomplishments, and being thus of Egyptian descent, he was besought by the king to remain, who proposed at once to make him an officer of his court, hoping at the same time through his connexion with the Arabs, to secure protection against their incursions and depredations. On condition of his acceptance he promised at the same time to confer upon Ishmael any gift he might

ask next to the throne or heirship thereto. It was not to be wondered that the dazzling splendors of the Egyptian court, the magnificence of the palaces, and the great and princely gifts proffered by the proud king of Egypt, together with the increasingly strong attachment which he felt in his heart for the young and lovely Egyptian princess, who, with her father, he had rescued from Arab violence, came with overwhelming power upon his young, impulsive, and aspiring nature, and seemed for awhile as though it would change the whole current of his destiny. But it was only for a moment his nature had to struggle with the temptation. His wild prophetic life rose up before him and gained the mastery, while the splendors of Egypt and the glory of its kingdom faded away in the brighter vision of scenes more congenial to his nature in his desert home.

Respectfully bowing before the king he declined his generous proposals, and asked but one boon at his hands. He was willing that the Arab prisoners might remain in bondage and continue to toil in the mines of the emerald mountains where they were confined, if the king would only bestow upon him for a wife the princess whom he had restored to liberty. He well knew that his love for the beautiful maiden was returned by an affection pure and ardent as her nature, all the deep impassioned affections of which were excited in his behalf. He knew

she felt that should even fate separate them, yet her destiny was linked with his forever. Father, mother, home, kindred, wealth, distinction, were all to her as the evanescent vapor exhaled by the sun from the waters of the sacred river when compared with the joy and rapture which filled her whole being when the light of his eyes were upon her and the music of his voice thrilled her soul.

There was, however, an impassable barrier to their union. Belonging as she did to the royal and sacerdotal line, none but those of her country and caste could hope to gain her hand in marriage, and so widely separated was her family from the surrounding nations, that only an honorary relation could be bestowed upon foreigners, and that only upon such as had obtained distinction in astrological lore. To such attainments he could lay no claim, and hence the cup of bliss which he had but tasted was about to be rudely dashed forever from his lips.

While the king and court were consulting upon the proposal of Ishmael, a venerable man among the magi arose, and advancing to the throne, said,

“O king, live forever. Is not this Egyptian the son of the great Abram, chief of all the astrologers of Babylon and Nineveh, and has not the great Unknown made him a priest in Mamre, and did he not, while residing in this palace, receive our most sacred mysteries and engage in our most solemn rites in the temple of the Sun?”

“Let the master of records search the chamber of rolls,” said the king, “and if thy words be true, then may the Arab chief be initiated in the most holy mysteries of our temple, and the desire of his heart shall be gratified—the young and beautiful Mirza shall be his companion forever.”

The vouchers were in due time obtained, and the record not only showed the fact, but set forth that no astrologer could be found in the world like to the Archimagus of Babylon. The king commanded that Ishmael should be initiated at sight, and ordered that he should at once be prepared for induction to all the sublime mysteries of the temple of the Sun.

The day at length arrived for the celebration of the sacred rites. The Arab chief had passed through all the preparatory scenes connected with the initiation, and accompanied by the master of ceremonies, into whose hands he was placed, and to whose guidance he was given, he repaired to the temple which was at some distance from the capital. An avenue of gigantic monsters guarded the way to a huge iron gate, over the arch of which was inscribed in mysterious characters, “*None but the free born, the good, and the brave, admitted here.*” The knock of the overseer of the outer gate is responded by a similar one within, but in a low sepulchral sound that startled Ishmael with its strangeness. Presently the massy gate swings back gratingly on its hinges, and they are permitted to enter. A subter-

anean passage is before them, which they enter by descending a flight of steps which lead down into the darkness below. The lofty arches resound with the tread of their advancing footsteps. The caverns of the Ghor were light and beautiful as Eden when compared with this gloomy pass. After proceeding a short distance in silence, the guide told Ishmael to stop and remain still for a few moments, and fear no evil. The command was unnecessary, for he seemed to have been placed immovably, and as it were, enchained in the depth of a gloom and obscurity profound as ancient night. He remained not long in this position until dim in the distance faint flashes of light break for a moment the darkness which surrounded him, revealing fresh horrors to his excited mind. By these transient flashes he caught glimpses of monstrous phantoms and awful specters. He also heard near him the frightful hiss of serpents, and the dismal howl of wild beasts, which were repeated and prolonged in the distance by the reverberations of the hollow arches. Anon an interval of silence would come, which, instead of a relief, awakened such overpowering, awful emotions in his mind, that a slight rustling, or even an agreeable sound, made him shudder. Far in the distance at length he saw a revolving light, and his guide approaching speaking words of comfort and courage, they march on with measured tread. As they advance, the light increases so as to make the objects

on either side visible. A change comes over the aspect of the place, and its decorations, the marble floor on which he walks trembles, and he seems to be raised up to a great height and then again sunk down into a profound abyss. Instantly he felt himself drawn rapidly along, and though unable to discover the impulse or attraction, yet he was constrained to obey the mysterious power which urged him on. Before his eyes, while gazing upon them, the pictures and marble sculptures which decorated the sides, became animated, beautiful images seemed to shed tears, unwieldy and colossal statues moved and walked and uttered harmonious sounds. Again the scene changed, and awful monsters, centaurs, harpies, gorgons, and serpents with an hundred heads, surrounded and menaced him, and with threatening aspect, endeavored to prevent his approach, but still he marched on. Phantoms bearing a perfect resemblance to beings from whom he had long been separated and for whom he had a strong attachment, flitted before him and shrunk from the embrace which they appeared to seek.

In the midst of these exciting scenes an awful peal of thunder shook the foundations of the gloomy passage, and all again was darkness. When the dreadful sound died away, there rose upon the still air a voice soft and calm as that of an angel. It called Ishmael by name, and inquired if he was willing to proceed in the mysteries of the temple.

To this he responded in the affirmative, when the unknown again addressing him in kind and gentle tones in the midst of the darkness, asked him what he most desired. Just then, and before he had time to reply, a burst of light above the brightness of the sun filled the whole passage, illuminating as with a blaze of day, every recess. Around him were objects of surpassing beauty, while before him, at an immense distance, were enchanted gardens and palaces, the beauty and magnificence of which excelled all that he had ever seen or imagined before. The fragrance of the flowers from these gardens of the blest filled the air, and the rapturous songs of most entrancing music which came from the palaces could only come from Paradise. The same voice which spoke to him and seemed like the presiding genius of the place, now addressed him and unrolled before him the mystic book, and revealed to him its mysterious characters, and explained the most sacred rites.

The ceremony was ended, and the Arabian chief was exalted to the sublime distinction of a magician of the temple; and now all that he needed to complete his happiness was the possession of his beloved Mirza. What he had already realized in the revelations of the temple was sufficient to compensate him for all the terror and danger through which he had passed, but the deeper mysteries yet to be unfolded, added to the right by possession thereof to the hand

of the young Egyptian princess, were enough to prompt him to a still severer trial of his perseverance and courage. But to him, so far as a right to the inheritance he sought in the rich and imperishable treasures of a woman's love—

“The gates were passed
And heaven won.”

It was not necessary that the further light which he sought, and to which he was now, by initiation into the lesser mysteries, justly entitled, should be obtained until he should lead to the altar the idol of his heart, and accordingly the company returned to the capital.

Every thing was in readiness for the celebration of the nuptials when they arrived. The king's palace was by the royal command, the appointed place for the performance of the ceremony; and when the hour arrived, which was on one of those bright and beautiful evenings for which the valley of the Nile is famous, a scene of gorgeous magnificence presented itself, which Nineveh in all its glory could scarcely outrival. A thousand incense-burners illumed the long ranges of elaborately carved Egyptian columns surrounding the court, and threw their light upon the grim colossal figures of the portico and avenues leading to and from the palace. The statues of the gods Osiris and Isis, Apis and Serapis, were garlanded with festoons of the most beautiful flowers. The throne was canopied with richest purple

and fine linen, and the diamonds on the crown and vestments of the king, like lights from eternity, shone with dazzling brightness. The nobility and beauty and pride of Egypt's proud capital were gathered there ; but among all the gathered throng there were none of more noble bearing than the Arab chieftain, with his dark dress and nodding plumes and golden signet, nor any more beautiful than his tall, slender, graceful, and happy bride. Upon them all eyes were fastened as they approached the altar, and when they took each other's hand as a signal of the union of destiny forever, there was a universal applause which resounded through the palace, and when it ceased, soft strains of

“Music arose with voluptuous swell.”

And king and nobles, magicians, astrologers, priests, princes, and princesses, alike partook of the general joy. Never was marriage attended with greater demonstrations of happiness than was witnessed on that occasion.

The morning after the bridal ceremony, the chief with his wife, attended by their servants, left the palace and started out on their journey in the direction of their wild mountain home, promising to return again at no distant day, the one to perfect himself in a knowledge of the higher mysteries of the temple, and the other to revisit the home and friends of her youth. We will not detain the reader by a

recital of the events of the journey homeward. Suffice it to say, that in due time the party entered the Ghor, and Ishmael and his wife were embraced by the chief and the mother, while the whole tribe united in demonstrations of joy.

Months roll away, and one scene of festivity followed another in the cavern. The immense spoil taken from the merchant princes was sufficient to support the whole tribe in the most luxurious living for years, and, no longer impelled by necessity, the chief felt disposed to give himself up to a season of rest and enjoyment. The young chief and his bride passed the time most pleasantly, and both engaged heartily in the study of Arabic. Frequently did they mount their steeds at the early dawn and sally forth along the coasts of the Red sea, and among its grand and beautiful scenery would they pass hours and sometimes whole days.

Being on the western arm of the Red sea, they could descry over the bosom of its blue and beautiful waters, the rocky shore of Mirza's native land. Here and there grew in wild luxuriance among the cliffs that lined the eastern shore, the oleander with its beautiful flowers. Beds of white coral sparkled amid the waters, and birds of bright plumage dipped their wings in the wave. On the east was a wide ocean of sand, stretching to the Elanitic gulf, with here and there an oasis, which resembled small islands covered with palm. Farther south rose

in dim perspective rough precipitous ranges of granite mountains, whose dark outlines were pictured against the sky.

“There,” said Ishmael as they journeyed onward, “is the mountain of our tribe. Shall we visit it and explore its rugged sides and towering summit. It is many a weary mile, but our fleet horses will soon bear us there.”

“Nay,” said Mirza, “not now. We had better return and procure guides and protection; besides, we have already been long absent, and our friends may be anxious for our return.”

Ishmael yielded to the suggestion of his wife, and they turned their course homeward. The Ghor, which we have already described, lay at the head of the gulf of Suez, and as they were anxious to reach home as soon as possible, they determined to travel all night. Indeed, night is the most proper season to travel in Asia, especially in those parts of it which lie near the equator. The sky, for months together, is perfectly cloudless, and the moon and stars shine with a radiance unknown to a northern latitude. As they journeyed on, they saw in the distance the fires of an encampment. It lay immediately in their route, and the only way to pass unnoticed was by taking a sweep around it in the desert. But the tramp of their Arab steeds had been heard, and the eye of Ishmael could detect the warriors on the look out for their approach. Already

had they mounted their camels, and it could be seen by the spears which glistened in the light of the camp fires that they were ready for action. Mirza trembled for their safety, but Ishmael drawing his trusty blade, drew up closely by her side and whispered "fear not. Though their numbers are too great for an encounter, no camels can overtake our steeds. We will wait until they approach, and then we will take a circuitous route in the desert in the direction of home." The Arabs finding that the approaching party had stopped, immediately sallied forth in pursuit, and spreading out at regular distances from each other from the coast into the desert, they swept along. No time was to be lost, and Ishmael starting at full speed, followed by Mirza, was soon face to face with the enemy. With his strong arm he smote down his foe, and they passed the line, and in a short time were beyond the reach of their pursuers. After a rapid ride of many hours they arrived in safety at the cavern, and were once more with their friends.

Having made all the preparations necessary for the journey to Sinai, Ishmael and his wife started with a strong guard. Passing along the coast to that point where they entered the desert, they at length arrive at the spot. After a few hours travel they came to the pass of Wadey Sheikh. On the right the mountains rose gracefully and majestically, and the perpendicular peaks were tinted with an empur-

pled rosy hue by the descending beams of the evening sun. Mountains of less magnitude were around, frowning in rugged majesty. These were the group of Gebel Serbal. Having passed through this Wadey, another was entered of a more deep and gloomy aspect. In this dark passage not a person was to be seen nor voice heard except their own. On both sides of the pass, like that of the Ghor, the mountains hung over and seemed to meet and toppling stand as if a breath would bring them thundering down into the chasm below. In the middle of the pass was a huge cavern entered by a very narrow secret way, and known only to the Sinaitic tribe. It was kept from the observation of travelers by having the entrance entirely closed by a huge rocky misshapen door, which would roll back on its concealed iron hinges. Here the party halted for refreshment and rest.

Resuming their journey, in a few hours of somewhat difficult traveling, they entered the plain El Raha, in the center of which rose up in gloomy grandeur before them the mountain of Sinai. Scattered here and there over the plain, were masses of rock which seemed to have been torn by some convulsion from the summit of the mountain. Interspersed here and there were accacias and palms and other trees, while up the sides and on the summit were thickly planted amid the rocks the trees of the mountain. Leaving the guard below, the chief and

his wife commenced the ascent. Soon they leave the gorge, and the beetling crags are above them, and clefts and caverns all around them. Steeper and steeper becomes the ascent, and finally their path lay between impending masses of vast magnitude, terminating above, and still farther on, by two arched gateways, the latter of which introduced them to a plain, covered with towering cypress trees. But they had scarcely entered upon their toilsome journey. Above and beyond were sharp hanging rocks, clefts, and caverns leading the way up to the towering summit. At length, after incredible exertion, it is gained, and there on the narrow peak the vast region of mountain scenery spread out in terrific grandeur around them. On every side, as far as the eye could reach, the white rocks and sands of Arabia Petræa glistened in the sun, while far to the southwest the blue waves of the Arabian sea seemed to mingle with the distant sky. Neither had ever beheld such grandeur and sublimity before, and, inspired with the scene, they prostrated themselves in adoration before the great God of heaven. After exploring the summit, they descended and joined the company they had left behind at the base of the mountain. Refreshments being in readiness for them, they partook, and returned to the secret cavern in the Wadey, where they passed the night, and next morning started on their homeward journey.

At length having arrived at home they gave

themselves up to quietness and study, occasionally partaking of the scenes of excitement and amusement around them.

Once, in company with his wife and a detachment of Arabs, being desirous of revisiting the oasis in the desert and again beholding the spot where he was saved from death by the angel, and where the tribe found him and his mother, Ishmael started out into the vast Arabian desert. The oasis lay on the borders contiguous to the land of Canaan, but the desert must be crossed to reach it; and as numerous warlike tribes infested it in various parts, it was necessary that he should be prepared for defense, though in the main there was a common brotherhood subsisting among the Arabs, yet, when they could not plunder, they would attack each other, and the conquerors would take the spoil, but with as little loss of life as possible, and without taking any prisoners.

It was while on this excursion that Ishmael saw in his solitry ramble in the afternoon of a sultry day, not far from the oasis where his company was encamped, a caravan in the distance crossing over to the desert of Beersheba in the direction of Lahai-roi. Returning quickly to his tent he gave orders to his tribe to remain until he should return, and taking Mirza, they mounted their steeds and soon were in pursuit of the caravan. They ascertained at the well Lahai-roi that the company had received

fresh camels and had started on in great haste to Mamre. Fleeter steeds never bore human beings than carried the chief and his beautiful Mirza, and better riders were never mounted in the chase than were the two who followed after. What they saw and what they heard, and how long they remained after their arrival at the tents of the venerable patriarch of Mamre, is given in a preceding chapter.

CHAPTER XIII.

DEATH OF ABRAHAM.

TIME rolled on, and during its progress many incidents occurred in the Siniatic tribe through whose power and influence, gained by successive victories, nearly all the vast desert became subject to its sway. Through the force of its arms, tribe after tribe joined its standard, its castles and fortifications became so numerous and powerful, especially in Rocky Arabia, that it was only by the payment of a heavy tribute effected through the negotiations of Ishmael with Egypt and Persia, that caravans were allowed to pass through the country. By this means the Arab Chieftains became not only strong and powerful but vastly opulent.

Ishmael had become a mighty chief, and at the death of his adopted father succeeded to the highest rank in the tribe. He had, in the mean time returned to Egypt, and in due order had received all the mysterious rites of the temple, thereby forming an enduring alliance with the astrologers, priests, and magicians of that nation, which lasted to the end of his eventful life. He had built for himself a magnificent castle among the rocks, and there, when free from the toils of war, he spent his

time in the bosom of his family. The promise of Jehovah made to his mother when she was an outcast from Mamre, and before he was born, had in part been fulfilled. The joyous shout of children met his ears as he ascended to his mansion, and in them he beheld a generation which was to succeed him, numerous as the stars of heaven, unconquerable as the sirocco that swept the desert, and irresistible as the whirlwind that rent the mountains. For their future fate he could have no anxiety. His faith in the Divine promise, already so wonderfully fulfilled, assured him that they like himself, were children of a destiny that no earthly power could set aside.

Hagar's eventful life was drawing to a close, but up to the latest hour did she watch with a mother's care over the training of her descendants, shaping their young and tender minds for that great drama of human life in which they were to be principal actors. Each of the sons of Ishmael was to become the head of a nation, and their descendants were to occupy the land until the end of time.

Desiring, as she did, to close her life at the fountain where Jehovah had appeared to her, and where the life of Ishmael was so wonderfully preserved, she was accompanied by the chieftain, his wife, and their children, with a detachment of Arabs, who, by short and easy passages bore her across the desert to the wilderness of Paran. Here

a tent was pitched for Hagar and the family, and every attention that filial kindness could bestow, was given to soothe and comfort the weary mother in her last hours. Day after day she partook of the reviving waters, but she continued to decline and grew weaker and weaker until the hour of dissolution approached, when she sank as sinks the evening sun in the unclouded skies of Araby.

Every voice was hushed in the tent of affliction, as softly and silently the last sleep stole over her senses. Affection could not stay her, or the sweet voice of her daughter would have arrested the spirit in its flight as she breathed gently into her dying ear the accents of love.

Farewell, thou wandering child of sorrow,—thou hast at last found an unbroken slumber. The God who saw thee and succored thee when an unfriended outcast alone in the wilderness, has taken thee to himself, and in that better world where jealousies are forgotten and rivalries are unknown, thou shalt dwell in peace forever.

The days of mourning being ended, on the spot where in agony she fell when her beloved Ishmael was supposed to be dying, her grave was made. Over this sacred spot Ishmael caused a temple to be erected, which he consecrated to the worship of his mother's God. This place of hallowed memories was afterwards known by the name of Mecca, which in the Arab tongue, means a place of great

resort in consequence of the numerous pilgrimages made to it from all parts of Arabia. No deadly strife had ever occurred here. Hostile bands here met as friends and brothers, drank together of the waters, and reposed in its shade. Here, in after years, Mahomet the prophet, a descendant of Ishmael, was born,—and here, after his long and brilliant career, he was buried, while his tomb is yearly visited by innumerable pilgrims even unto the present day.

But we must now return to Mamre,—to the family of Abraham. Sarah slept in quiet repose among the rocks and evergreens and flowers of the consecrated Machpelah, and Abraham had taken to himself other companions to comfort him in the wearisome journey of life. Isaac and Rebecca had been blessed of the Lord with children of wonderful promise and equally wonderful destiny. They had removed to the patriarchal possessions at Lahai-roi, and through the powerful influence of his father, Isaac had become a mighty prince in Palestine. He possessed a calm and quiet disposition, uniting the gentleness of his mother with the urbanity and self-possession of his father, and nothing afforded him greater happiness than to rule over his own household and cultivate amity and peace with the surrounding princes. While the voice of his exiled brother was for war, and his very name was a terror to the dwellers in the desert

and all who traversed its wastes, his was the voice of peace, and his friendly alliances embraced the entire country. Abraham had also other sons born to him which in after years became heads of nations, men of various destiny scattered abroad. In process of time his already extensive possessions became vastly enlarged, and the astrologer and exile from Chaldea became one of the mightiest princes of the East.

His pilgrimage, however, was about to close, and having done the errand of his destiny on earth, he was about to join his beloved in heaven. He had now reached the age of one hundred and seventy-five years, embracing a period of several generations, and after having witnessed more in the eventful history of his life than any who had preceded him, and having more involved in that history, so far as human destiny was concerned, than was ever before or since known to man, he made all due preparation for his departure from earth. That he might make that disposition of his estates, which to him seemed right and proper, he summoned all his descendants to the paternal abode at Mamre.

The proud heart of Ishmael the eldest and consequently the first-born of the patriarch, when through the intelligence of messengers, he learned that his younger brother Isaac was to inherit the vast estates of his father, and he, with the remain-

der of the sons, were only to receive gifts, refused to be present on the occasion, and sent one of his chief officers to inform his father that he needed not his gifts nor his protection, as God had given him the whole of Arabia, and if he chose he could make Palestine subject to his sway. The intelligence troubled the patriarch not a little, as he recollected how he had sent the mother and his boy fugitives abroad in the desert. That all motives for an invasion of the territory of Isaac, whose pacific disposition would lead him to make any sacrifices for peace, might be removed out of the way, Abraham conceived the idea of sending his other sons into the distant East. Accordingly, after having bestowed upon them princely gifts according to their age, he pronounced upon them his blessing and sent them away. He would gladly have looked upon the face of his son Ishmael again before bidding adieu to the world, but from what he had learned of the Arab wildness of his disposition, he entertained no hopes of ever beholding again his first born. Isaac was to him now his only hope, and as the child of promise miraculously preserved, but not more so than Ishmael, the child of destiny, he was the consolation of his declining days. With all the tender solicitude of an affectionate child, Isaac watched his declining hours. Rebecca, also, the dutiful and affectionate Rebecca, never left the side of the dying patriarch.

On one of midnight's loneliest hours, when every voice was hushed and all was still in Mamre, Isaac and Rebecca were watching with intense anxiety the last flickering rays of life that gleamed from the sunken eyes of the patriarch as he lay stretched on the couch of death. He had given them his parting blessing and had turned away to breathe his last, as two strangers, a man and woman, dressed in Arab costume, entered the tent and walked softly to the side of the couch. From their dress and manners, the former of which displayed a richness and elegance, and the latter an ease and grace which are rarely met with, they evidently belonged to the higher caste of Arabian nobility. After gazing for a moment upon the unconscious patriarch, the Arabian turned to the weeping Isaac and said,

“Does my father live?”

A moment, and brother was in brother's embrace, and Rebecca and Mirza following the example, were locked fast in sisterly affection. The expressions of surprise and tenderness which occurred at that hour, however, passed not the dull cold ear of death. The patriarch had gone to the spirit world. It was not for him to gaze upon a scene which would have caused his heart to rejoice in the midst of affliction and death, but he had passed away to that world where nothing is hidden from the pure bright vision of the departed.

When morning came, the sad news of death was borne in every direction. Every tent bore the traces of affliction and sorrow, and Mamre was clad in mourning as when the beloved Sarah died. Death, however, came not as he often comes, with angry brow and relentless arm, to smite down youth in all its flower of pride and loveliness. The rosy health of youth's soft cheek was not made to decay by his blighting touch as when the angel of death spread his wings over Sodom or the camp of the proud Assyrian, but like summer's softest sweetest sigh that shuts the rose, the spirit of Abraham was wafted away when full of years and ripe for immortality, to the home of the blest.

The days of mourning being ended, preparations were made for the funeral,—and to pay the last tribute of respect for the memory of the prince and patriarch of Mamre, the former friends and allies of Abraham assembled from all parts of the country. Princes from Arabia, Astrologers and Magi from Egypt and Chaldea and Persia, came to the funeral. At length the solemn procession is in motion, and sad strains of music fill the air as the multitude wind through the grove in the direction of Machpelah. First in the train following the hearse are Isaac and Rebecca, then Ishmael and Mirza, with the numerous relatives of both families, and their children. Then followed the sons of Abraham by Keturah, and their wives and children,

after which came the Astrologers, Magicians, and Priests of different lands, and last of all the numerous servants of the patriarch. It was a solemn scene, and as the procession entered the rocky cemetery, in the deep shade of which was the family vault which contained the ashes of the long departed Sarah, Isaac and Ishmael lifted up their voices and wept. The vault being opened, and all things being in readiness for depositing the relics in their last resting place on earth beside those of his beloved Sarah, the funeral chant began, which was followed by solemn and mysterious rites, when all that was earthly of him who led the most eventful life and exhibited the most remarkable faith, having obtained a name which has come down through all succeeding generations as the "friend of God" and the "father of the faithful," was committed to dust.

Slowly and sadly the procession returns, and the various companies which had assembled from various parts of the land return to their respective homes, solemnly impressed with the scenes they had witnessed, realising that it was better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of mirth, and that by the sorrows of earth the heart is made better. After remaining a few days the descendants of Abraham separate for their homes. Isaac and Ishmael, Rebecca and Mirza, take a last and fond adieu, never to look upon each other's faces again

in this world. They had met but once before since Ishmael's cruel exile, but that was in the house of mirth, when all was joy and gladness, when the favorite son was united to the blooming and highly favored bride. They met when a father's blessing rested alone upon an idol child, upon whose destiny no evil star shed its baleful influence, and when the proud heart of the ill-fated Ishmael for a moment was tremulous with emotion, and then was filled with stern and settled rage, but not despair, for he too was a child of destiny, and wildly he went out to fulfil that destiny in the desert land. But now they meet again, not that Ishmael may be excited to jealousy and revenge, for he is a prince among his equals, and needs neither patrimony nor favor from man. He had already cut his way through mountainous difficulties up to the highest point of earthly renown, and his name was known, honored, and feared, from the Euphrates to the Red sea, and from Sinai to the gates of Damascus. Through his swift-winged messengers he had kept himself advised of the declining health of his father, and from time to time was apprised of his approaching dissolution, and he had of his own free will and accord come to see him die. He was his father still, though he had sent him away from home and friends, and he had a generous heart as well as a daring hand. But he came too late to meet with recognition. The darkness of death was on the

father, for he had entered the valley and was crossing death's river ere the son arrived. Thus Ishmael and Isaac met, and now they were forever to part and never to meet again until they should meet in the communings of another world, where all that separates us here can have no existence.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CHILD OF PROMISE.

AFTER the days of mourning for his father had ended, and all matters pertaining to the immense possessions to which he had fallen heir, Isaac, with a sad and heavy heart, left Mamre with all its scenes connected with his childhood and youth, and the hallowed associations which every where came crowding around him waking sorrowful reminiscences of departed joys, never, alas, to return, and took up his abode at Lahai-roi. The dead, though left, were not forgotten. Often would his mind wander to that cool sequestered rocky cave on the mountain range where slept in undisturbed quiet and solitude his loved though lost father and mother.

He was the promised child, and through him the covenant made by Jehovah with his father was to descend, and whose family in its far-reaching branches was to spread itself out and possess the land from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates, the Kenites and the Kenizzites and the Kadmonites and the Hittites and the Perizzites and the Rephaims and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Girgashites and the Jebusites.

Prior, however, to the occupancy of this vast country, the descendants of Isaac were to pass through various fortunes; they were to be strangers in a strange land, where they were to be reduced to a state of vassalage, and groan for centuries under the yoke of cruel tyrants until the power of God should be magnified in their behalf, and they should be delivered from bondage and enter upon their God given inheritance.

Soon after the arrival of Isaac at Lahai-roi, or Beersheba, the great Jehovah appeared to him while engaged in offering up the evening sacrifice, and said, "Go not down into Egypt; dwell in this land which I shall tell thee of. Sojourn in this land and I will be with thee and will bless thee, for unto thee and unto thy seed I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I swore unto Abraham thy father, and I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and I will give unto thy seed all these countries, and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed."

Twenty years had now passed away since the marriage of Isaac with Rebecea, and although to him was the promise renewed and through him was a nation numerous as the stars of heaven for multitude to spring, yet he had no children. It required a faith like to that which was exercised by his father in the divine promise, and although every thing wore a gloomy aspect in regard to its fulfil-

ment, still he staggered not at the promise which had in his own person been so far confirmed. By him the fight of faith was manfully fought, and in fervent prayer and humble reliance upon Jehovah, whose wonderful interposition in the behalf of his father sustained him in the conflict, he believed on. At length the time came for its fulfilment, Rebecca became pregnant, but there were circumstances connected with that delicate condition of a more painful character than usually fell to the lot of Oriental women. So extreme were her sensations that she sought relief at the divine oracle, and in consultation received the startling intelligence that she should be delivered of two children who should be the heads of two distinct powerful nations, and that the contest in which they should engage for superiority had already begun ere yet they were born, as prophetic of their future history, and that in process of time the one first born should yield to the superior force and power of the other. The time of her delivery at length arrived; the child that first entered the world was covered with red hair, and he was from this circumstance called Esau, which in the Hebrew tongue signifies hair cloth. The birth of the other immediately succeeding and so closely that he touched his heel with his hand, was a circumstance which gave rise to another remarkable name, and he was called by his father, Jacob, which signifies the supplanter of his

brother. Notwithstanding the wonderful revelation made to Rebecca in regard to the destinies of her children, involving as their lives would an immense amount of anxiety and trouble to her maternal heart, still they were alike her children, and she rejoiced over them with all the fullness of a mother's love. As they grew up around her and she beheld their infant minds expand under her parental training, and in their young and innocent glee they were happy in the light of her smile, the thought of the future, when those now guileless hearts would be filled with envy and hatred toward each other, and those soft gentle tones would grow harsh and angry, and those delicate hands hardened into manhood would be lifted up in deadly strife, would fill her mind with sad and melancholy forebodings.

The days of their youth had come, and father, mother, and children were happy in the endearments of their peaceful home. They could not but witness a great dissimilarity in the temper and habits of their sons. The first born had rough and ruddy features; with a fiery spirit and bold if not reckless daring he would sally forth to the wilderness with the hunters to join the chase. The other was of calm and peaceful disposition and sought his happiness in the quiet retreats of home. His features, unlike those of his elder brother, were mild and comely, indicating a mind unsuited to the tumults

and hardships of life. His chief desire seemed to be in the domestic quiet of home, and his mother's society was more to him than all else beside. The gentleness of his disposition and the quietness of his demeanor were such as to endear him to his mother, who watched over him with maternal tenderness, and often manifested for him a greater partiality than for the wild and daring Esau. The elder brother was, notwithstanding his roughness of aspect, the pride of his father, who was delighted at his bravery and the success which crowned his efforts in the excitements of the chase. The affection of the father was requited by the son, who often brought him from the forest of Beersheba the products of his skill as a hunter in the savory venison which loaded the table of the patriarchal tent.

An event occurred about this time, which, while it developed the character of Esau and Jacob, at the same time was connected with events of a more remarkable character in their future history, on account of the important bearing which it had upon their destiny. Scripture history informs us that on a certain occasion, as Esau returned from a long and toilsome chase weary with fatigue and hungry, as he approached the tent of his father, he met his brother who was just about to partake of a savory mess of red pottage which had been prepared for him. On account of its redness it was called

Edom. Approaching his brother Jacob, weak and faint for want of food, he thus addressed him.

“Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage, for I am faint.”

To this humane request Jacob replied, “Sell me this day thy birthright.”

Almost dying with hunger, having been long away and unsuccessful in the chase, Esau replied in his extremity, “Behold, I am at the point to die, and what profit shall this birthright do me?”

“Swear then to me,” said Jacob, “this day.”

Esau took the fatal oath and sold his birthright, and partaking of the pottage and lentiles, he departed.

We may ask what were the rights of primogeniture or titles or distinction or wealth to a man perishing with hunger if they cannot procure for him assistance in that dreadful hour. And we may ask what the kindness and hospitality of a brother at home in plenty who could take advantage of such a dire necessity and rob his brother of his rights? Alas, that such gentleness and amiability of disposition should at once, as if by some infernal alchemy, be changed into a sordid selfishness that could, like a canker, eat out of the soul every generous impulse and kindly emotion. Strangely mysterious is this transaction in the life of the descendants of that patriarch through whom all earth's families were to be blessed, and who were to

be the channels through which were to flow in unceasing streams a universal love and good will to man.

After this event, Esau was called Edom from the nature of the pottage, as has already been remarked. He had sold his birthright, and feeling little interest in a home where his mother and brother had consorted against him, he hasted to the wilderness of rocky Arabia, and in the mountains of Sin, which stretch in wild and gloomy grandeur along the southern extremity of the Dead sea, and include the northern portion of what is denominated Arabia Deserta, he halted with a view to make it his abode. He was now in the confines of the country of Ishmael, his father's brother, and having met some of the wandering tribes of that wild chieftain in his hunting excursions, he sought, now that he was an exile from home, to unite his fortunes with that wild and fearless people. After a long and weary journey he arrived at length at the rock built castle of Ishmael, and making himself known to his uncle, with the circumstances connected with his exile, he was received by him with marked hospitality and treated in a princely style. Nor was he long in proving himself worthy of the alliance, for in many of the journeys of the tribe to which he was attached, did he give evidence of a skill and bravery in the chase and in the fight, which won the hearts of all. Intelligence of his

heroism soon reached the ears of Ishmael, and he felt proud of such a kinsman. This attachment increased until a period arrived in which an opportunity was afforded him of giving still stronger evidence, by granting the hand of his daughter, a young and beautiful maiden, in marriage to the young and noble hearted Esau. The chieftain at once promoted him to the head of a tribe and assigned him possessions in the mountains of Seir, from which circumstance the country was afterwards called Edom.

But we must return to the family and fortunes of Isaac. Though engaged extensively in the cultivation of the earth, and having numerous flocks and herds, men servants and maid servants, like his father, his resources were exhausted by a famine which prevailed in the land, and like his father he resolved on moving to Egypt, always the land of plenty, for no matter how wide spread and desolating was the famine which reigned in the countries of the East, Egypt's granaries never were exhausted, the unfailing waters of the Nile causing the land to yield her increase. Gathering together his moveable property, consisting of servants and cattle, he departed. When he had arrived on his route at the town of Gerar, a city belonging to the Philistines, he was admonished by Jehovah not to go down into Egypt, but to remain where he then was, assuring him that he should be secured from all the consequences

of the famine; have plenty to subsist upon, and in obedience to the oath which he had sworn to his father Abraham, would cause his descendants to multiply exceedingly, and possess the whole land of Canaan.

Accordingly, in obedience to the Divine command, he resolved to take up his residence at Gerar. He had agreed with his wife Rebecca to resort to a stratagem which presents the same strange and remarkable species of deception which was adopted by his father at the same place and from precisely the same motives. The coincidence is wonderful, and if Isaac had been made acquainted with the conduct of his father, and the reproof which he received of the Lord for such an unwarrantable procedure, we are at a loss to know how to explain it. But so it was: fearing that his wife, on account of her beauty, would be sought for by the king of Gerar, who had the power of appropriating all the handsome females of his kingdom to his own use, it was agreed between them that she should pass for his sister. The deception worked admirably for a time, and nothing could be seen in the familiarity which existed between them that would indicate any other relation than that by which they passed as brother and sister. For a long time he dwelt in peace and safety in Gerar, and nothing occurred to interrupt the happiness of the patriarchal family. At length, however, suspicions were awakened that

all was not as it seemed, and that a more intimate relation existed between Isaac and Rebecca than would justify the assertion that they were only brother and sister. To satisfy himself fully in regard to this point the king resolved to watch their movements closely, and beholding on a certain occasion as he looked through his window a scene which could not with propriety transpire only between husband and wife, he was confirmed in the belief that Isaac had deceived him, and accordingly summoned him to his presence.

“Behold,” said the king, “of a surety she is thy wife, and how saidst thou, she is my sister !”

“I said she is my sister because I should have been slain for her.”

The king then issued a command that whosoever should touch Isaac or his wife should surely be put to death.

A certain portion of the land was assigned to him, and he prospered exceedingly, so much so that in the same year his land brought forth an hundred fold, his servants and flocks and herds also increased astonishingly, and his possessions became vast, so much so that he was envied by the Philistines. Such was their animosity that they filled up the wells which his father Abraham had dug during his residence in Gerar. So great was his influence and power, that the king becoming fearful that his further continuance would be a source of trouble,

said to him "Go from us, for thou art much mightier than we." Upon this Isaac removed with his family and took up his possessions in a valley adjoining the town of Gerar. The difficulties, however, which existed between his servants and those of the king still followed him, and such was the unhappy state produced by the unfriendly collision, that he finally determined to return to his old home at Beersheba.

Scarcely had he arrived at his home than, as an indication that the movement was a right one, the Lord Jehovah appeared unto him and renewed the covenant in the following words. "I am the God of Abraham thy father; fear not, for I am with thee and will bless thee and multiply thy seed for my servant Abraham's sake."

Here he erected an altar and offered up his sacrifices, and under the divine auspices all things pertaining to his family went on prosperously.

The friendship which existed between Isaac and the king of Gerar was not interrupted, notwithstanding the difficulties which existed between their servants, and it was not long until an opportunity presented itself for renewing that friendship. Taking with him one of his friends and allies together with the captain of his army, the monarch of Gerar paid a visit to Beersheba, and seeking the presence of Isaac, they presented themselves as his friends. That he might not be left to conjecture in regard to

the motives which prompted the visit and the object they had in view, and that the mind of Isaac might be perfectly at rest in relation thereto, they immediately laid before him the design of their visit.

“We have seen,” said they, “that the Lord Jehovah is with thee, and we desire that a covenant should be entered into between us, and as we have done thee no harm, having sent thee away in peace, we ask that an oath may be taken of a friendly alliance.”

The proposition was well received by Isaac, and having now an opportunity of reciprocating the hospitalities which he had enjoyed at the hands of the king, he ordered a sumptuous feast prepared, and the allies delighted themselves in the social entertainment thus provided.—Having accomplished the object of their visit, early one morning, with the blessing of Isaac and his house, they departed to their homes in peace.

We now return to Esau. Having as we have already seen, been received with great favor by the chieftain of Arabia, and having been admitted into his family and promoted to the chieftainship of a powerful tribe, he started out with his young and heroic wife, bearing away with him the blessings of his father and mother, to enter upon his possessions in the mountains. The region of country in which he settled was wild and rocky, being composed of long mountain ranges, frightful chasms, steep and

dangerous precipices, with here and there vast amphitheatres opening out from narrow valleys, and rising up on either side hundreds of feet. One of these amphitheatres of rock was entered by a narrow pass scarcely sufficient to allow two horsemen to pass abreast. From the sides of this avenue the rocks rose up to a height of five hundred feet. This was the only entrance and outlet. Within, the surface was level, with here and there fissures in the rocky pavement, while around on every side the rocks rose up perpendicularly to the same height of those in the narrow entrance. Out of the openings in the rocks, both in the pavement and around the sides, grew in great abundance wild fig trees and luxuriant vines, with here and there oleanders, whose beautiful flowers contrasted strangely with the bald granite rocks from which they sprung. For safety or pleasure no retreat could offer greater inducements to a desert wanderer in the whole range of the wild and rocky country which came to the possession of Esau. As it had been formed by the hand of the Creator as an abode for man, while it furnished in its enormous bunches of grapes and large luscious figs, the richest food to satisfy his hunger, a pure and perpetual stream of sparkling water issued from the base of a perpendicular cliff and meandered through the amphitheater, finding an outlet in the narrow pass we have already described, quenched his thirst.

Here in this city of Rock, as it was afterwards called and which name it bears to this day, Esau, with his lovely and beautiful wife and numerous warriors, took up his abode. In this mountain home he was visited by Ishmael and Mirza, and many were the happy days spent in each others society. To render the place still more desirable, Ishmael sent to Egypt for artificers in stone, and out of the mountain sides which rose up around them, were excavated a royal palace. To this were added other dwellings for the tribe, and tombs for the dead were constructed, as also a temple for the worship of Jehovah, the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Ishmael, as well as Esau and Jacob. So famous did the city of Rock become, that in after years being visited by Pharaoh who had in his family become allied with the descendants of Esau or Edom, the proud king of Egypt had a temple cut out of the rock, which bears his name and stands perfect to this day. Additional ornaments were made to grace the city, and among these were triumphal arches in commemoration of victories achieved by Esau and his warriors.

CHAPTER XIV.—CONTINUED.

WHILE the king of Edom, for the country was now called by his name and he was every where hailed as its ruler, was engaged in extending and fortifying his territory by well disciplined warriors, a message came to him from Beersheba. It was from his father, who had now grown old, and who feeling the infirmities of age creeping upon him, realized his near approach to death. Before his departure from earth he was desirous of once more enjoying the presence of his first born, and imparting to him his dying blessing. Though Esau had a rough exterior he had nevertheless a kind and generous heart, and he could not but feel kindly towards his aged father. Accordingly, having made the necessary preparation, he started on his journey towards his childhood home. While on his way as he passed through the wilderness of Beersheba, where he had spent his boyhood days in the wild sports of the chase, the recollection of his brother's unkindness and the advantage he took of his necessities were brought to his mind with painful vividness. Notwithstanding he had been deprived of his birthright, yet, so wonderfully had he been prospered in his way, occupying as he did

a position of power and influence vastly superior to his brother, that he had long since dismissed the thought, and had not the scenes through which he was passing called up the recollection of the event, he would not have allowed the act of Jacob to have disturbed his wonted tranquility of mind.

At length he arrives at the old homestead, and the patriarch being apprised thereof, requested that he be brought immediately into his presence. He desired to receive him alone, and Rebecca the mother, aware of the intent for which he had sent for him, placed herself in a position where she could overhear all that was said. This she was enabled to do the more readily from the fact that Isaac through age had become blind. No sooner had a servant announced his presence in the private chamber and departed, than the following conversation ensued:

“Esau, my son.”

“Behold, here I am my father.”

“Behold, now that I am old, I know not the day of my death. Now, therefore, take, I pray thee, thy weapons, thy quiver and thy bow, and go out to the field and get me some venison and make me a savory meat, such as I love, and bring it to me, that I may eat, that my soul may bless thee before I die.”

“I will, my father,” and so saying, he departed.

All this was communicated to Jacob by his

mother, and being determined to thwart the purposes of Isaac and bring the blessing which he intended for Esau upon his idolized brother, she hit upon the following expedient, illustrative of her strong partiality as it was of the ever fruitful mind of woman: she directed Jacob to go to the field and kill two kids and dress them, bringing her the skins. When he returned she prepared the mess of savory meat, and taking the skins, she so cut and fitted them upon the hands and neck of Jacob as to make him resemble his brother; then taking the raiment which Esau had left in his haste when he departed from home in quest of his fortune in a strange land, she placed the savory mess in his hands and told him to go and give it to his father.

When he appeared in the presence of the blind patriarch, he thus addressed him:

“My father!”

“Here am I, who art thou my son?”

“I am Esau, thy first born; I have done according as thou badest me; arise, I pray thee, sit and eat of my venison, that thy soul may bless me.”

“How is it that thou hast found it so quickly, my son?”

“Because the Lord thy God brought it unto me.”

“Come near, I pray thee, that I may feel thee my son, whether thou art my very son Esau or not.”

At this Jacob cautiously approached his father,

who on feeling his hands exclaimed, "the voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau. Art thou my very son Esau?"

"I am."

"Bring the venison near to me and I will eat of it that my soul may bless thee."

Jacob accordingly brought the dish and placed it near his father, at the same time giving him wine, which he drank.

After he had finished the repast he called Jacob, still supposing him to be Esau, and said, "Come near now and kiss me, my son." He approached and kissed him, and smelling the odor of Esau's raiment with which the deceiver was clothed, he exclaimed, "the smell of my son is the smell of a field which the Lord hath blessed, therefore Jehovah give thee of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine. Let people serve thee and nations bow down to thee, be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee. Cursed is every one that curseth thee, and blessed is every one that blesseth thee."

Scarcely had the blessing been pronounced and Jacob departed from the presence of his father, ere Esau returned from the hunt with the venison. Having prepared it he carried it to his father, and placing it before him, said,

"Let my father arise and eat of his son's venison, that thy soul may bless me."

“Who art thou?”

“I am thy son, thy first born Esau.”

The fearful truth now flashed upon Isaac’s mind that he had been deceived, and his whole frame shook with agonizing emotion.

“Who?” he exclaimed, “where is he that hath taken venison and brought it to me and I have eaten before thou camest, and have blessed him; yea, and he shall be blessed.”

The words of the father fell with crushing weight upon the heart of Esau, and he cried out in the bitterness of his soul, “Bless me, even me also, O my father!”

To this Isaac replied, “thy brother came with deceit and hath taken away my blessing.”

“Is he not,” said Esau, “rightly named Jacob, for he hath supplanted me these two times; he took away my birthright, and behold now he hath taken away my blessing; but O my father hast thou not reserved a blessing for me?”

“Alas, my son, I have made him thy lord, and all his brethren have I given to him for servants, and with corn and wine have I sustained him, and what shall I do now unto thee, my son?”

“Hast thou but one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me, also, O my father!”

These words were uttered with passionate earnestness, they were more than the patriarch could bear, and in the fullness of his heart he exclaimed, “Be-

hold, thy dwelling shall be the fatness of the earth and of the dew of heaven from above, and by thy sword shalt thou live and shalt serve thy brother, and it shall come to pass when thou shalt have the dominion, that thou shalt break his yoke from off thy neck.”

For the first act of Jacob by which he had taken advantage of the necessities of Esau he was forgiven, but for this last act Esau was too greatly incensed, and though he would not embitter the last days of his father by seeking revenge, yet, so soon as he was dead and the days of mourning for him were ended, he would slay him. Rebecca, fearing such a result, sent Jacob to her father's house in Assyria. Here he married two wives, and remained for a period of twenty years. Esau returned to his home in Edom.

Some difficulties arising between Jacob and Laban, his father-in-law, he determined to leave Assyria with his wives and flocks and herds, and return to Canaan. He had been twenty years absent from his native land, and now that he was on his return, the various scenes through which he had passed were vividly presented to his mind. The inhumanity and unrighteousness of his conduct in taking advantage of his brother's necessities, robbing him of his birthright, and his subsequent deception practised upon his blind old father by which he deprived Esau of his blessing and secured

it for himself, came up before him, and associated as the recollection of his conduct was with the injustice perpetrated upon him by his uncle, he could not but feel that he had deeply wronged and injured his brother. Under such impressions, as he approached the confines of Edom on his journey, he became greatly troubled. This was greatly increased by being stopped in one of the passes of the Seir mountains by a troop of Arab warriors, who only allowed him to proceed on his journey by his claiming kindred with Esau. In his mind again was revived the fear of Esau, whose threat prompted him to leave home and go to Assyria. In this state of perturbation he resolved on sending an embassy to Esau for the purpose, if possible, of allaying his resentment, and securing conditions of peace. Accordingly, he sent his brother the following message :

“My lord Esau, thy servant Jacob saith thus, I have sojourned with Laban and stayed there until now. I have oxen and asses, and men servants and maid servants, and I have sent to tell my lord that I may find grace in his sight.”

But the warriors who had intercepted the path of Jacob in the mountains had apprised Esau of his approach, and supposing that his father was dead, for he had heard nothing for a long time from Beersheba, he took a chosen band of four hundred warriors and went out to meet him. The messen-

gers sent by Jacob had not proceeded a great way on their journey until they met Esau with his army, and being made acquainted with his intentions, they hastened back to inform Jacob. The intelligence was of a startling and terrific character, and he scarcely knew what could be done. As no time was to be lost, he resolved upon the following:—Taking one half of the people and the flocks and herds, he sent them in advance, with the following presents for Esau, namely, two hundred she goats and twenty he goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, thirty milch camels with their colts, twenty she asses and ten foals. Each drove was to be kept separate, and they were directed forward. When they approached the army of Esau, which halted as they came up, the chieftain addressing the first servant, said, “Whose art thou, and whither goest thou.” “These,” replied the servant, “are thy servant Jacob’s, and all are a present sent unto my lord Esau, and behold he also is behind us.” As the droves passed in succession the servants uttered the same language. When night came, he took his wives and maid servants and eleven sons, and sent them over the ford Jabbok, and he was left alone. In the darkness and solitude he engaged in supplication and prayer. Thus he prayed, “O Jehovah of my father Abraham, and of my father Isaac, who saidst to me, return into thy country and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee, I am

not worthy of the least of all thy mercies, and all the truth which thou hast shown unto thy servant, for with my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands. Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me and the mother with the children. Thou saidst I will surely do thee good and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude." While thus engaged in prayer, an angel appeared, and in his great distress and anguish of soul he seized hold upon him, believing him to be the angel of the Lord, and determined not to let him go until he should be assured of deliverance and safety from the wrath of Esau. The angel told him to let him go, at the same time struggling to escape; but Jacob clung with a death grasp, and so great was the conflict, that his thigh was thrown out of joint. "Let me go," said the angel, "for the day breaketh!" "I will not let thee go," said Jacob, "except thou bless me."

"What is thy name?" said the angel.

"My name is Jacob."

"Thy name shall be no more Jacob, but Israel, for as a prince hast thou power with God and hast prevailed."

"But what is thy name?" said Jacob.

"Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name?"—and he blessed him there. After the

angel departed, Jacob exclaimed, "I have seen Jehovah, face to face, and my life is preserved."

When the sun rose over the Jordan, Jacob beheld Esau advancing with his four hundred men, and taking his handmaids and their children, and going before them, they all approached Esau. Soon as he was near enough to be recognized, Jacob bowed himself seven times. The kind heart of Esau never failed him, for no sooner did he see his brother in this attitude, than he dismounted and ran and fell upon his neck and embraced and kissed him. In the sight of those stern mountain warriors and the multitude of servants around, those brothers lifted up their voices and wept. After this the wives and children and servants all came forward and bowed to Esau, who received them with the same kindness he had his brother. After the interview was ended, Esau, at the urgent solicitations of Jacob, took the presents which he had provided, and returned to his home a happier if not a better man.

Jacob continued his journey and concluded to select a desirable location in the valley, where he built a house and made booths for his cattle. This place was afterwards called Succoth. Here he remained for some time and increased his prosperity, until it occurred to him that he would remove to Shalem, a city of Shechem in the land of Canaan. Here, adjoining the city, he purchased land and

erected an altar which he called El Elohe-Israel. In consequence of family difficulties, he was directed of the Lord to leave his place of residence and go to Bethel, where Jehovah had appeared to him in his flight from his enraged brother Esau. Here he erected an altar which he called El Bethel. While here, Jehovah appeared unto him and said, "Thy name is Jacob, thy name shall not be called any more Jacob, but Israel shall be thy name. I am God Almighty; be fruitful and multiply, a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins, and the land which I gave Abraham and Isaac, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed after thee will I give the land."

After this interview Jacob set up a pillar in commemoration of the event, and consecrating it by libations of oil and wine, he removed from Bethel and started for Edar. On the journey, Rachel, one of his wives, was delivered of a child, and as she survived its birth but a short time, it was called Benoni, but the name was subsequently changed to Benjamin. This was the first death in the family, and many were the tears and loud the lamentations of its numerous members. The place at which this melancholy event occurred was Bethlehem, and after she had been deposited in the grave, Jacob erected a pillar over the spot to mark the resting place of his beloved. From this sad spot he jour-

neyed on until he reached his destination and pitched his tent a short distance beyond the tower of Edar.

While here, intelligence reached him of the death of Isaac, his father, who had removed from Beersheba to the old homestead of Abraham his father, at Mamre. Immediately on the receipt of this sad intelligence he dispatched messengers to Esau in Edom, informing him of the melancholy event, and requesting him to join him at Mamre for the purpose of paying the last rites to the remains of their departed father. Every thing being in readiness, Jacob gathered together his family, consisting of Leah and her sons Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar and Zebulon, and the sons of Rachel, Joseph and Benjamin. He also summoned the sons of his concubines, Dan, Naphtali, Gad and Asher, and departed for Mamre.

The journey was a rapid one, and in due time the company arrived at Mamre. Scarcely had they rested from the toils of travel ere it was announced from the tent of affliction that Esau and his company, on fleet Arabian chargers, were seen coming in the distance. The brothers met again in a fond fraternal embrace and shed their tears of anguish over the lifeless remains of their father. All partook of the grief of that hour. It was necessary soon to bear the remains to their last resting place, as Isaac had now been dead several days. Accord-

ingly, a procession was formed, composed of Esau, Jacob, their wives and children, and the friends of the patriarch in the surrounding country who had come to the funeral, and with slow and solemn step they marched to the cave of Machpelah, where Abraham and Sarah had been entombed long years ago. After the obsequies were ended, the families started for their respective homes.

Jacob's possessions were now immense, and he devoted his attention mainly to the cultivation of the soil. This was accomplished by his many servants, while his numerous flocks and herds were principally kept by his sons. Joseph, the first born of Rachel who had died, was now seventeen years of age. He was a youth of great promise, of fine manly though delicate proportions, and of singular personal attractions. On these and other accounts he was greatly beloved of his father, who frequently manifested for him an undue partiality. Whether to distinguish him from the rest of his brethren when at a distance in the field, or to impart to him a dignity above them, is a subject concerning which the sacred record is silent, but so it was, that Jacob had a coat made for Joseph of several colors. The favoritism thus shown by the father became an occasion of envy and hatred among the brothers against Joseph, and it was with difficulty that they could treat him with any respect or kindness. This animosity and hatred was increased to a still greater

extent by the following circumstances:—It seems that Joseph had two dreams, in one of which he found himself in a field binding sheaves, and the sheaf which he bound rose from the earth and stood upright, while those bound by his brethren stood round about and made obeisance to it; in the other dream he saw the sun and moon and the eleven stars do obeisance to him.” These dreams he related to his father and brethren. The father rebuked him, saying, “Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren, indeed, come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth?” The brethren indignantly replied, “shalt thou indeed have dominion over us!”

Soon after this the sons were sent with the flocks to Shechem, with the exception of Joseph, who was retained at home. Indeed, so great was the father’s attachment for him that he could not bear to have him out of his sight. One day, being anxious to hear from the eleven, for he had received no intelligence from them since their departure, he called Joseph to him and informed him that he wished him to go to Shechem for the purpose of ascertaining how the young men were getting along, and return as soon as possible and report. When he arrived within a few miles of the place, he met a stranger, who, on inquiring about his brethren, told him they had some time since removed from Shechem to Dothan. Accordingly he directed his course thitherward, and on arriving in sight of his brethren,

being easily distinguished by his parti-colored tunic, all their rage was at once excited.

“Behold,” said one, “yonder comes the dreamer. Come now and let us slay him and cast him into a pit, and we will say some evil beast hath devoured him, and we shall see what will become of his dreams.”

Reuben, the first born of Leah, said, “let us not kill him, shed no blood, but cast him into this pit that is in the wilderness, and lay no hand upon him.”

When Joseph came up, before he had time to dismount and salute his brethren, he was rudely seized, dragged from his horse, his many colored coat torn from him, and he forced forward and thrown into the pit. As he sank down into its dark depths they departed, and coming into the vicinity of their flocks, they sat down to eat and drink and to make merry. While thus engaged, they saw in the distance a caravan of Ishmaelites laden with the precious commodities of the East, on their way to Egypt. As they drew near, Judah said, “what profit is it if we slay our brother and conceal his blood? Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother and our flesh.” At the same time there came along Midianites, merchantmen, and the brethren drew Joseph out of the pit and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver. The

traders mounted him upon a camel, and soon he was on the way to Egypt. During the transaction Reuben was not present; he had returned into the forest for the purpose of procuring means whereby to liberate his brother from the pit and send him home. When he returned to the place, he found him not, and supposing his brethren had slain him, he rent his clothes in anguish, exclaiming "whither shall I go?" When he came to his brethren he learned what disposition had been made of him. The brethren, to conceal their guilt, determined to practice the following deception upon their father: They killed a kid, and dipping his coat in the blood, sent it to their father, saying, "This have we found, now know whether it be thy son's coat or no." Jacob at once recognizing it said, "It is my son's coat, an evil beast hath devoured him, Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces." The father was instantly filled with grief, and rending his garments, he put sackcloth upon his loins and mourned many days. Though all his son's and daughters rose up to comfort him, still he refused all consolation, and in the bitterness of his spirit exclaimed, "I will go down to my son in the grave mourning."

The caravan at length arrived in Egypt, and as Joseph was a delicate and likely young man, they took him to the court of Pharaoh, where being met by Potiphar, the captain of the guard, he was immediately purchased by that officer for himself.

Being extremely modest, diffident, and retiring in his manners, the captain of the guard at once took him to his own palace and made him servant to his wife. His gentleness and kindness, combined with a great devotion to his master's interests and all that pertained to his palace, were such as to win the hearts of all, and such was the confidence inspired in the mind of Potiphar in regard to his fidelity, that he placed him over all the servants, and put him in possession as superintendent of all his possessions. His youth and beauty of form and person made a strong and powerful impression upon the voluptuous nature of his master's wife, and she became so enamored of his charms that it was with her a living passion which like a fire raged with uncontrollable violence within her tumultuous bosom. To possess him and enjoy his society alone and exclusive, was her only desire, and to effect this object, she resorted to all the arts of which women of passion and pleasure are capable. Young and guileless, he knew not the web that she was endeavoring to weave around him, nor the power of fascination she was exerting to charm him from the path of virtue and fidelity. With flushed cheek and languishing eye and heaving bosom she would approach him, and with all the tenderness of woman, solicit him to sin. But he was proof to all her seductive smiles, nor did he for a moment,—so wonderfully did Jehovah interpose in his behalf,—

feel an improper desire arise in his heart. Her burning glances and seductive wiles affected him no more than would the glancing moonbeams an icy mountain. It was not that he had no feeling and was exempt from all those passions which are common to humanity, for he was in the full bloom of life, but God had sealed the fountain of his virtue, and had placed around it an angel guard, so that no wicked hand should disturb its deep and quiet waters.

Chagrined and disappointed, and feeling her pride wounded, with still a burning desire, she resolved upon another effort to lure him to her embrace. On a certain day she had arranged it to have all the servants away from the palace, and sent for Joseph to come to her chamber. He accordingly obeyed the summons, and went trembling with fear. No sooner had he entered than she caught him in her arms, and with more passionate expressions of tenderness than she had employed before, she entreated him to yield to her solicitations. To all this Joseph replied, "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" At this he struggled to escape from her embrace, and so violent was the effort that a portion of his garment was torn from him in the struggle. Her love was now turned into anger, and a fiendish hatred taking possession of her heart, she resolved on revenge. Scarcely had he left the chamber until she raised a cry of alarm, and it being heard from without, it

was not long until some of her servants were in her room. "See here," said she, holding up the portion torn from the garment of Joseph, "the Hebrew that he brought to me came in to my chamber to violate my person, and as I cried with a loud voice, he fled and hath left part of his garment."

When Potiphar came to his palace she related to him the same story, and his anger was greatly excited at the rehearsal, so much so that he instantly ordered his apprehension, and had him cast into the royal prison among the malefactors of the realm. Though his position in society had thus suddenly become changed, it did not change his character; that proved sufficiently strong to resist the power of temptation on the one hand and persecution on the other. It was not long here as elsewhere that he was permitted to remain, until he became a favorite, and so greatly was he esteemed by the jailor, that he entrusted all the prisoners to his care.

Sometime after the imprisonment of Joseph, the chief butler and baker of Pharaoh's palace, for some offense which they had committed against the king, were cast into the prison. They had been placed in the same ward with Joseph, and hence were placed under his care. One morning they informed Joseph that they had both dreamed, and they were sad on account of them. He requested

them to relate their dreams, which they did as follows:—The chief butler saw a vine with three branches which budded and bloomed and brought forth ripe grapes. The chief baker saw three white baskets placed on his head, in which were all sorts of baked meats for the king, but the birds came and eat them. “This is the interpretation of the dreams,” said Joseph, “the three vines are three days, at the expiration of which time,” addressing the butler, “thou shalt be taken out and set at liberty.” Then addressing the chief baker, he said, “the three white baskets are three days, at the expiration of which time thou shalt be taken out of prison and hanged upon a tree, and the birds shall eat the flesh from thy bones.” After three days all was fulfilled as Joseph interpreted.

It was now a period of two long years since Joseph was cast into prison, and notwithstanding his kindly offices to the chief butler, he had entirely forgotten him, not even so much as mentioning his name. A circumstance, however, occurred at this time which brought him to remembrance. Pharaoh had a dream, as follows:—He stood on the bank of a river, and he saw coming out of the same, seven fine large cows, and they went to feeding in a meadow which lined the margin of the river. And again he saw seven poor lean cows come out of the river after them and follow them to the meadow. He saw also in his dream the seven lean cows eat

up the seven fat cows, after which he awoke. But he dreamed again on this wise:—He saw seven large full ears of corn grow upon one stalk, and seven thin ears, blasted by the east wind, grow upon another stalk, and the seven blasted ears ate the seven full ripe ears. The dreams greatly troubled the king, and being anxious for their interpretation, he summoned all the magicians, astrologers, and wise men of his realm immediately to his presence. They came at his command, but none of them were able to interpret them or give the least hint as to what they should indicate. While all was anxiety, the chief butler made his appearance and uttered the following language:—“I do remember my faults this day. The king recollects having committed myself and the chief baker to prison, and how that I was graciously liberated while he was hanged. Now it came to pass that we both dreamed, and we told our dreams to a fellow prisoner, a young Hebrew who was a servant to the captain of the guard, and he interpreted them so that they came to pass just as he had said.” On hearing this, the king immediately sent for Joseph, and being duly attired, he was presented before him in the royal palace. Having informed him of the object of the interview, he related his dreams and asked an interpretation. After giving him to understand that it was by Divine inspiration that dreams were interpreted, Joseph gave him the following

explanation:—"Both dreams have the same signification, and Jehovah in them shows thee what he is going to do. The seven fat kine and the seven full ears are designed to represent seven years of plenty, and the seven lean kine and seven blasted ears represent seven years of famine which shall prevail throughout all the land of Egypt." In addition to this, he gave him instruction in regard to the raising of crops and the stowing away of the produce of the land, in granaries in the large cities of the realm, so that notwithstanding the famine should be wide spread and grievous, there should be enough and to spare from the great plenty with which the land should be blest. Pharaoh was highly pleased with the interpretation and advice of Joseph, and regarding him as the wisest man in all his kingdom, he immediately promoted him to the highest honor and authority, averring that only in the throne should the king have the pre-eminence. Then taking the royal ring from his finger, he placed it on the finger of Joseph, and placing a chain of gold around his neck, he arrayed him in royal vestments. He then ordered the royal chariot, and placing him in the same, he ordered the officers of his court to go before him and cry out to the multitude:—"Bow the knee before the man whom the king hath made ruler over all the land of Egypt." The king then gave him an Egyptian name, Zaphnathpaaneah, and presented him for a wife Asenath, the daughter of Poti-pherah a priest of On.

Being invested with the vice-royalty of Egypt, he made a journey throughout the length and breadth of the land, and made all the arrangements necessary for garnering the fruits of the earth during the seven years of plenty which were to ensue. In process of time he was blest with children, the name of his first born was Manasseh, and the second was called Ephraim. At length the seven years of plenty came to an end and the seven years of dearth began. When the inhabitants of the rural districts had exhausted their supplies, they came to the royal city and made application to the king for relief, who, on hearing their complaints, referred them all to Joseph, telling them to observe whatsoever he should command them. Intelligence soon came from all parts of the world that the famine was raging, and multitudes flocked to Egypt. Among the number of those who came from Canaan were the sons of Jacob, with the exception of the youngest. One day, as Joseph sat upon his chair of state dispensing orders in the distribution of corn to the numerous applicants, he saw ten Canaanites enter the hall, and as they approached him, he at once recognized them as his brethren. It was now ten years since they had sold him as a slave, and from the position which he occupied, as well as his altered appearance and the peculiar manner of dress which he wore as vice-regent of Egypt, he was entirely unknown to them. As they came near him, in a rough commanding voice he said,

“Whence came you?”

The eldest replied, “From the land of Canaan to buy food.”

“Ye are spies; to see the nakedness of the land ye are come.”

“Nay, my lord, but to buy food thy servants are come. We are one man’s sons, we are true men; thy servants are no spies.”

“Nay, but ye have come to see the nakedness of the land.”

“Thy servants are twelve brethren, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan, and behold the youngest is this day with our father and the other is not.”

“That is what I said unto thee, ye are spies. Hereby shall ye be proved. By the life of Pharaoh ye shall not go hence until you bring your youngest brother; send one of your brethren, to bring him, and ye shall be kept in prison until your words may be proved whether there is any truth in you, or else by the life of Pharaoh surely ye are spies.”

They were accordingly put in prison where they remained three days, at the expiration of which time Joseph went to them and spoke through an interpreter as follows:—“This do, and live, for I fear God. If ye be true men, let one of your brethren be bound in prison, and let the rest go and carry corn for the famine of your houses; but bring your youngest brother unto me, so shall your words be verified and ye shall not die.”

Deeply impressed with these words, they said one to another,—“We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul when he besought us and we would not hear him, therefore is this distress come upon us.” To this Reuben replied, “Did I not say unto you, do not sin against the child, and ye would not hear, therefore, behold also his blood is required.”

The heart of Joseph was touched by this conversation, and filled with emotions he could not repress, he turned aside to weep. As soon as he was able to command himself, at their permission he commanded Simeon to be bound, and released the others. He also directed the merchants to fill their sacks with corn, and privately put the money which they had paid, into the sacks. All things being in readiness, they departed on their journey homeward. When they completed one day's journey, and had stopped at an inn for the night, one of the brethren in opening his sack for the purpose of getting some corn for his animal, found on the top the money which he had paid for the same; on examination it was found that all the sacks contained the amount paid. At this all the brethren were greatly terrified and were wholly unable to explain the mystery. At length they arrived at home and made their father acquainted with all the circumstances which had transpired, and how that the lord of the country had required them to bring

their youngest brother, retaining as a surety for the performance of the demand, their brother Simeon as a prisoner. When Jacob heard this he was greatly distressed and exclaimed:—

“Me have you bereaved of my children, Joseph is not and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away; all these things are against me.”

To this Reuben replied, “slay my two sons if I bring him not to thee; deliver him into my hand and I will bring him unto thee again.”

“My son shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead, and he is left alone; if mischief befall him by the way which ye go, then shall ye bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave.”

The famine continued grievous in the land, and it was not long until the stock of provisions brought from Egypt was exhausted, and it was necessary to get a supply. Jacob accordingly summoned his sons and commanded them to go again to Egypt for food. At this Judah responded, “The lord of the country did solemnly protest, saying, ye shall not see my face except your brother be with you. Therefore if thou wilt send our brother with us we will go, otherwise we can not go.”

“Why,” said Jacob, “did you deal so cruelly with me as to tell him you had another brother?”

“Because he asked us of our state and of our kindred, and we knew not his designs. If thou

wilt let Benjamin go with us I will be surety for him, and if I bring him not back to thee, then let me bear the blame forever.”

“Then take your brother, but take with you double money and presents of balm, honey, spices, nuts and almonds, and God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may return your other brother and Benjamin.”

Thus they did as they were commanded and started on their journey. When they arrived in Egypt and presented themselves before Joseph, he commanded that a sumptuous feast be provided, and they were all invited to the princely banquet. When they were informed by the steward of Joseph’s palace of his request, they were astounded, and supposed that he had an evil intention; but that officer told them to fear not, for all would be well. Simeon was brought from the prison, and all being in readiness, they entered the palace, and approaching Joseph, bowed with their faces to the earth, presenting their gifts. Joseph received them kindly, and in an affectionate tone inquired after their welfare, saying, “Is your father well, the old man of whom ye spake? Is he yet alive?”

“Thy servant our father is in good health, he is yet alive,” saying which they again bowed themselves.

Looking upon Benjamin, he said, “Is this your brother of whom ye spake. God be gracious to

thee my son.” But the scene was too trying for his affectionate and gentle nature, and he fled from the banqueting hall to his chamber, and gave vent to his feelings in tears. As soon as his emotion had subsided, he returned, and taking his seat with them at the table apart from the Egyptians, for Hebrews may not eat with them. Special attention and favor was shown in serving Benjamin at the feast. Great was the joy and rejoicing of that hour. When the feast was ended, the steward was commanded to fill the corn sacks, and secretly to place in that of Benjamin the silver goblet of his lord, which was lined with gold. Early next morning they were on their way. But they had not proceeded far until they were overtaken by the steward, who charged them with base ingratitude. “Not content with receiving corn without pay, and all the hospitalities of my lord’s house,” said he, “you have stolen the silver and gold of his table.” They at once protested their innocence and said, “if it be found on any of us, he who is guilty shall die, and the rest of us shall be thy lord’s bondmen.” “Let it be as thou hast said,” replied the steward, “and he shall be my servant.” On searching, the goblet was found in the sack of Benjamin. At this they were all filled with horror and amazement, and rent their clothes with anguish. Agreeably to the stipulations they all returned to the court of Joseph. When they made their appearance they were so

confused they knew not what to say. Joseph perceiving this exclaimed, "What deed is this ye have done; know you not that such a man as I can certainly divine?"

"Behold," said Judah, "we are my lord's servants, both we and he also with whom the cup is found."

"God forbid," said Joseph, "that I should do so, but the man in whose hand the cup is found, he shall be my servant, but as for you, get you up in peace to your father."

Judah stepping forward immediately replied, "Let not my lord be angry. If Benjamin go not back to his father, the old man will die with sorrow. Take me as thy bondman in his stead, for I became to my father a surety for his safe return."

At this, Joseph, whose feelings were becoming intensely excited, cried out to the captain of the guard, "Cause every Egyptian to leave me instantly;" and when all were gone but his brethren, unable to restrain himself any longer, he burst out into a passionate expression of grief. As soon as his feelings had subsided sufficiently to speak, he rose from his seat, and advancing towards his brethren, said, "I am Joseph, doth my father yet live?" The brethren were overwhelmed and confounded, so that they could not speak. He repeated "I am Joseph, your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt; be not grieved or angry with yourselves for

having sold me, for God did send me before you to preserve you, to make you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. It was not you that sent me hither, but God, and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt. Haste ye and go up to my father and say unto him, thus saith thy son Joseph, "Jehovah hath made me lord of all Egypt. Come down unto me, and tarry not, and thou shalt dwell in the land of Goshen, and thou shalt be near unto me, thou and thy children, and thy children's children, and thy flocks and thy herds, and all that thou hast, and there will I nourish thee, for there are yet five years of famine." After thus speaking, he embraced Benjamin, and they all wept together for joy. All this was known to Pharaoh, and by him well approved, insomuch that he ordered the necessary wagons for the transportation of the family, and supplied the company well with provisions for the journey. He also sent numerous and costly presents to Jacob, and urged him to come and make his home in Egypt. When they returned and the intelligence was communicated to the aged patriarch that his son Joseph was alive and ruler in Egypt, he was so overjoyed he fainted. When he revived, he said, "It is enough, Joseph my son is alive; I will go and see him before I die."

Preparations being made for the exodus to Egypt,

the now numerous family took their departure. Stopping at Beersheba, Jacob offered up sacrifices and thanksgivings to Jehovah, who appeared to him and said, "I am the God of thy father, fear not to go down into Egypt for I will there make of thee a great nation. I will go down with thee into Egypt, and I will also bring thee up again, and Joseph shall put his hand upon thine eyes." Thus encouraged he rose and pursued his journey. Judah having been sent before as a messenger to inform Joseph of the approach of his father and family, consisting of seventy persons, the viceroy took his chariot and went out to meet them. When they met, a scene of most touching interest presented itself. No sooner did Jacob recognize his long lost son than he embraced him, fell upon his neck and kissed him. Then with tearful eyes he looked upon him and said, "Now let me die since I have seen thy face, because thou art yet alive." The father was taken in the chariot of Joseph and introduced to Pharaoh, who received him kindly and assigned him and his posterity a portion in Goshen.

Here they lived and increased in prosperity. Jacob died and was taken by Joseph to Canaan and buried. The Israelites increased greatly, insomuch that in a few hundred years they numbered three millions. During this time they were reduced to slavery in Egypt, but God interposed in their behalf, and by a series of terrible judgments, deliv

ered them, and under the leadership of Moses they went to Canaan, became a great nation, boasting a long line of kings and prophets. From them came the Savior whom they rejected, and for which they were scattered among the nations of the earth, though numerous as in the days of Solomon.

CHAPTER XV.

THE CHILD OF DESTINY.

IN the fate of Ishmael and his posterity we have the fulfilment of prophecy quite as wonderful, but still more startling and terrific than that which at present hangs like a dark and gloomy pall over the posterity of Isaac. We have already traced the son of the Egyptian mother, from the period when a homeless outcast child in the desert, with none but a mother to care for him, and we saw that mother in her despair lay him down to die,—but we saw a divine interposition in his behalf, his destiny was not yet fulfilled, and the child was snatched from the grave, and borne on by a providence as wonderful as it was marked, from period to period, in his history, until from the chieftain of a single tribe, he rose to the chieftainship of all the wandering tribes of the East, and his own sons became mighty princes and warriors, and he possessed a power and dominion which extended from the gulf of Persia on the East to that of Arabia on the West, and from the Mediterranean on the North to Yemen and Hydramant on the borders of the Indian Ocean. In the fastnesses of the mountains of Arabia Deserta, and on the plains of Arabia Felix, this mighty

prince constructed his palaces and fortresses, and pitched his tents. As early as the death of his father Abraham, he had become the terror of all surrounding nations,—and no commerce could be carried on with the East and the vast and mighty cities of the Nile, without his permission and protection. The twelve sons of Ishmael became proprietors of as many towns and castles as there were names among them, and it was thus that when Isaac was leading the peaceful life of a shepherd, and his sons were quietly with him in the green and fertile valleys of Canaan, living in tents, and subsisting according to the simple rules of patriarchal life, Ishmael was a wild and daring warrior on the mountains and valleys and plains of Arabia, living in rock built palaces, subsisting upon the spoils of the East, and reveling in oriental luxury.

And it was thus that when Esau forsook his father's house, having been deprived of his birth-right and his blessing, that Ishmael received the homeless wanderer, and gave him a name and a place among the princes of his house. Having passed to an hundred and thirty-seven years, increasing in wealth and power and influence, having already borne to the grave his idol wife and the mother of his valorous sons, the period at length arrived for Ishmael's departure. He had known and had worshipped the God of his father, and how far the consolations of that grace which had so

lavishly been bestowed upon his divinely favored and fortunate brother were imparted to him, we know not, for as concerning his end the Scripture is silent, but that he wrought out his destiny to the very letter of prophecy, all history declares.

We dare not enter the secret place of that Being whose pavilion is darkness, spread over deep waters and enveloped in thick clouds of the skies, and we cannot know the mysteries of that Providence which gave to the children of the same father such a different destiny, and we shall wait the opening of that morn when all secrets shall be made known, when that which we now can only know in part shall be known perfectly, and the Great Eternal Father shall justify his ways to man. Till then we are satisfied, and though human reason stagger at the developments of this life, we are supported by a faith firm and everlasting, that "though clouds and darkness are round about Jehovah, yet righteousness and judgment are the habitations of his throne."

We have seen also how the fortunes of Isaac descended through Jacob to his posterity, and how, under the blessings of God, every event, however seemingly unpropitious in the beginning, wrought out in the end the most incalculable good. How from a family of seventy, Israel increased to millions, and when from a state of unparalleled prosperity they were reduced to a cruel and degrading slavery, and how by the Almighty arm they were delivered, and

miracle succeeding miracle preceded and attended them in all their desert journey to Canaan. We have seen how in the land that flowed with milk and honey, God given and God blessed, they spread out their power and influence, and became the mightiest nation in the then known world, and how that through them, the promised seed, all the nations of the earth were blessed in the incarnation of a Savior in the royal line. We saw when in the glory of her power, the proud and haughty Babylonian bear away in chains her exiled bands as strangers, to the far off valleys of a strange and inhospitable land, and we saw again at the command of Jehovah, emanating from that same demolished throne, an edict for the restoration of their scattered wanderers, and the rebuilding of the desolate city and temple, and we heard the sound of their coming from the lands of their exile, and beheld as their feet pressed the green sward of their native mountains. Once more at home, and their temple rebuilt with its worship restored, we saw it again, but a sad reverse had come, the crown had fallen from the head of Judah, the scepter of regal and ecclesiastical authority had departed, while the gorgeous temple with its courts, the magnificent palaces with their marble covered domes, the tombs and terraces where were deposited her kings and prophets, alike desecrated, despoiled, and left a heap of ruins, over which the feet of the profane have

trodden now for centuries. Scattered and peeled among the nations of the earth, we now see Israel a hiss and a by-word, yet existing a distinct and separate race among their foes, keeping up their ancient worship and sustained by the hope of their fathers.

But we must return. The wandering Ishmaelites had never been driven from the land of their father; unconquered and unconquerable they still maintain their possessions in the desert, and it is only by sufferance that they will allow the foot of the stranger to press its sands or cross their territory.

But what became of Esau? We left him at the funeral of Isaac and intimated his fortunes in Rocky Arabia. When the Israelites were on their way to Canaan, they arrived on the borders of Edom, the country then occupied by the descendants of Esau. This country stretched across their entire path, extending from the mountains of Moab at the south east corner of Palestine, to the very borders of Ezion-Gaber on the eastern head of the Red Sea. They could, by passing through a narrow defile which running east and west, divided the mountain chain between the metropolis of Edom and Mount Hor, in a few hours pass the wilderness to the borders of the great desert, which lay on the east of it very near the place where they were to begin to take possession of the land of Canaan. While encamped at Kadesh Barnea, Moses sent

messengers to the king of Edom, requesting him to grant them a passage through his territory, and urging the request on the ground of the relationship which existed between the descendants of Esau and Jacob. But the king of Edom utterly refused them a passage, and marched an immense army to the frontier to resist the attempt, should it be made. The consequence was, that they had to retrace their steps and were obliged to march round the entire territory of Edom.

History informs us that before there was a king reigning in Israel, Edom swayed a scepter of power unrivalled in the East, and that a long line of dukes dwelt in Petra, that fifty thousand warriors could issue from its capital, at a moment's warning, to resist the attacks of their foes. But this was not all their force;—besides being allied to the Ishmaelites, they had a line of forts extending throughout the length of the kingdom. They were, however, doomed. A dreadful fate had been pronounced against them, their cities were to be depopulated, and they themselves to be destroyed. The time was to come when not one descendant of Esau should have an existence upon the earth, when the very name should be blotted out forever. Prophecy had foretold that the temples and palaces of Petra should be deserted, and that not even the ashes of an Edomite should be found in her rocky tombs; that the owl and cormorant and bittern should

inhabit their temples and fortresses, and that none should pass through Edom forever.

We hear no more of the Edomites till the days of Saul, who warred against them with partial success, but their entire subjection was reserved for David, his successor, who first signally vanquished them in the Ghor beside Usdum—the mountain of Salt—and finally placed garrisons in all their country. Then were fulfilled the ancient prophecies to which we have alluded, that the elder should serve the younger, and also the prediction of Balaam, that Edom and Seir should be for possessions to Israel. Solomon established a naval station at Ezion-Gaber, at the head of the gulf of Elath, the modern Akaba. Towards the close of Solomon's reign an attempt was made to restore the independence of the country, by Hadad, an Edomite prince, who, when a child in the days of David's invasion, had been carried into Egypt, and had there married the sister of Tahpanes, the queen. If Edom then succeeded in shaking off the yoke it was only for a season, since in the days of Jehoshapat, the fourth Jewish monarch from Solomon, it is said there was no king in Edom, a deputy acting as viceroy of the king of Judah. That the latter was ruler of the country, is evident from the fact of his having fitted out a fleet at Ezion-Gaber. This deputy joined the confederates of Judah and Israel in their attack upon Moab. In the reign of Jehoshapat there was

a partial revolt of the Edomites, or at least, of the mountaineers of Seir, and under his successor Jehoram, they wholly rebelled and made a king over themselves. Notwithstanding the temporary suppression of the rebellion, Edom revolted from under the throne of Judah, and it is probable that the Jewish dominion was never completely restored. Amaziah, indeed, invaded the country, and having taken the chief city, Petra, in memory of the contest, changed the name to Joktheel (subdued of God), and his successor Uzziah, retained possession of Elath. In the reign of Ahaz, hordes of Edomites made incursions into Judah and carried away captives. About the same period, Rezin, king of Syria, expelled the Jews from Elath, which was thenceforward occupied by the Edomites. Now had come the period when the other part of Isaac's prophecy, that Esau should take his brother's yoke from off his neck, was fulfilled. The Edomites employed their recovered power in the enlargement of their territory in all directions. They spread as far South as Dedan in Arabia, and Northward to Petra. When the Chaldeans invaded Judah, under Nebuchadnezzar, the Edomites became their willing auxiliaries, and triumphed with fiendish malignity over the ruin of their kinsmen, the Jews, of whose desolated lands they hoped to obtain a large portion to themselves. By this circumstance the hereditary hatred of the Jews was rekindled in greater fury

than ever, and hence the many dire denunciations of the daughter of Edom to be found in the Hebrew prophets. From the language of Malachi, and also from the accounts preserved by Josephus, it would seem that the Edomites did not wholly escape the Chaldean scourge, but instead of being carried captive, like the Jews, they not only retained possession of their own territory, but became masters of the South of Judea as far as Hebron. Here, however, in course of time, they were successfully attacked by the Maccabees, and about the year 125 B. C., were finally subdued by John Hyrcanus, who compelled them to submit to circumcision and other Jewish rites, with a view to incorporate them with the nation. The amalgamation of the two races, though proceeding from the same common stock, was, however, not effected, for we afterwards hear of Antipater, an Edomite by birth, being made by Cesar procurator of all Judea, and his son, commonly called Herod the Great, was at the time of Christ's birth, king of Judea, including Edom, and Roman writers often speak of all Palestine under that name. Not long before the siege of Jerusalem by Titus, twenty thousand Edomites were called in to the defense of the city by the Zealots, but both parties gave themselves up to rapine and murder. This is the last mention of the Edomites in history, and it is somewhat remarkable that their last public act should be in defense of the metropolis of their

brethren, though their conduct was not the most commendable on that occasion.

From the era of the Crusades down to the beginning of the present century, a period of upwards of a thousand years, the land of Esau has been shut up to the whole civilized world. Its location even, on the best maps, place it more than a hundred miles from its true position, and as if lying in a direction where it is now known there is nothing but a vast expanse of desert. Volney had his attention drawn towards it when at Gaza, by the vague reports of the Arabs about the wonders of Petra, and in 1807, the unfortunate Seetzen penetrated a certain distance into the country, and heard of the wonders of the Wady Mousa, but the first modern traveler that passed through the land of Edom, was Burkhardt, in the year 1812, and had he accomplished nothing in those wonderful regions, his journey would have been worth all the labor expended on it, although his discoveries thus shed their strongest light on subjects not at all comprehended in the plan or purpose either of himself or his employers.

Burkhardt entered Edom from the North, and in the year 1818, he was followed in the same direction by Messrs, Legh, Bankes, Irby, and Mangles. In 1828, Laborde and Lindant found access from the South, and since that period it has been visited and described by so many travelers that the

names of its localities have become as familiar as household words. The long lost city of Esau, now without an inhabitant, guarded by the wandering Arab, by whose permission alone the solitary traveler can enter its avenue and walk through its ruins, is all that is left to tell of the power and glory of the brother of Jacob. Every step reveals wonders, the excavations, whether formed into temples, tombs, or palaces, surprise the wondering traveler by their number and extent. They not only occupy the face of the entire mountain by which the valley is encompassed, but the numerous ravines which radiate on all sides from the enclosed area; and were these excavations, instead of following all the sinuosities of the mountain and its numerous gorges, ranged in regular order, they would form a street six or seven miles in length. The front of the mountain is wrought into facades of splendid temples, rivalling in their aspect and symmetry the most celebrated monuments of Grecian art. Columns of various orders of architecture, graceful pediments, broad rich entablatures, and sometimes statuary, all hewn out of the solid rock, and still forming part of the native mass, transform the base of the mountain into a vast splendid pile of architecture, while the overhanging cliffs towering above in shapes as rugged and wild as any on which the eye ever rested, form the most curious and striking contrast. But nothing contributes so much to the

magical effect of some of these monuments as the rich and various colors of the rock out of which, or more properly in which, they are hewn. Red, yellow, azure or sky blue, black, and white are seen in the same temple or palace in successive layers, or blended so as to form every shade and hue of which they are capable; as brilliant and soft as they ever appear in flowers, or in the plumage of birds, or in the sky when illumined by the most glorious sunset. It is impossible to describe the wonderful effect of tall graceful columns exhibiting these exquisite colors in their succession of regular horizontal strata.

But the descendants of Esau, who inhabited this vast city of rock, are gone. They have been blotted from the history of nations, but the descendants of Ishmael remain numerous and powerful as ever, still working out their wonderful destiny, "their hand against every man and every man's hand against them."



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